

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal: The sun also sets p.11

Al-Ahram Weekly

Wars over Suez: 2-page special pp.14&15

No.245 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

2 - 8 November 1995 | 20 Pages | P.T.50

Bad move

AFTER meeting with President Mubarak yesterday, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa took strong exception to the US Congress' decision to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem by 1999, calling it "mistaken and unnecessary", reports Nevine Khalil.

"We will not recognise it. We will not abide by it. We will not accept it," Moussa said emphatically. "We are adamant in our position that Jerusalem is subject to negotiation and we will not recognise any attempt to change its status."

Moussa said "This decision has crystallised the apparent dangers surrounding Jerusalem, and cast a shadow over future intentions on Palestine and the destiny of Jerusalem," he said.

Lawyers walk

FOR the second time in three days, lawyers defending a group of 49 Muslim Brotherhood figures decided yesterday to walk out of their military trial, insisting that the Supreme Military Court had no jurisdiction to hear the case.

The lawyers first walked out on Monday but some of them re-appeared on Tuesday, although the presiding judge had commissioned another group of lawyers to take up the defence. On Wednesday, a representative of the original panel attended the court session to announce that they were walking out again.

In another development, a southern Cairo prosecutor ordered the release of Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, a Muslim Brotherhood figure who is also secretary-general of the Bar Association, and five of his associates, on a bail of LE500 each. El-Banna, who is running for election in the Cairo constituency of Al-Darb Al-Ahmar, is accused of leading a procession that disrupted traffic in the area for two hours. (see p.2)

SPLA victory

THE REBEL Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) claimed to have scored a strategic victory this week against the Sudanese government army in south Sudan. In what an SPLA spokesman described as the largest military confrontation between the two sides in four years, the SPLA seized five strategic military areas in the eastern province of Equatoria, along the strip between Nemuli and Torit.

Yasser Aman, an information officer at SPLM headquarters told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Our evaluation is that the SPLA has regained the military initiative — the government suffered the biggest defeat in the last four years and lost hope of realising an overwhelming victory." (see Soapbox, p.11)

Torture order

A US-based human rights group condemned Israel's recent decision to allow the shaking of Palestinian suspects, confirming that it can cause brain damage or death. The Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights called for the immediate end to the use of shaking by the Israeli Security Service, Shin Bet, in a statement issued Friday. It cited the death of one member of the Islamist group, Hamas, of brain hemorrhage last April after being tortured by shaking during questioning by the Shin Bet.

On 19 October, the Israeli cabinet extended the use of shaking and other tough torture measures for three months after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin overruled an order by Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair to limit shaking to cases of the utmost urgency.

INSIDE

Political business in Amman

Reserved governments, pragmatic businessmen and vice versa. Samia Nkrumah, **in Amman, looks for the politics behind the business**

The official Egyptian position at the Amman Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit is that regional economic cooperation should run parallel to progress towards a comprehensive peace settlement and the removal of weapons of mass destruction from the region.

But brushing aside the turbulent political waves that swept over the conference, a delegation of Egyptian businessmen had their eyes firmly set on the economic future. With each businessman paying $1,500 to the World Economic Forum to participate in the conference, the question for them was whether they had got their money's worth.

"The summit was successful," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa yesterday after briefing President Hosni Mubarak on its outcome. Summing up the official Egyptian position, emphasising the need for regional economic cooperation and nuclear disarmament to go hand in hand with peace-making, Moussa said: "None of those elements should be ignored in favour of the others."

The three-day summit ended on Tuesday night with an announcement of the creation of a new cross-border Middle East bank with a $5 billion start-up fund. The bank's headquarters will be in Cairo. With the backing of Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinians and the United States, the bank will be structured to promote development of the private sector, support regional infrastructure projects and provide a forum to promote regional economic cooperation.

The summit also decided to establish a regional tourist board and a regional business council to promote cooperation and trade between the private sectors of the countries of the region. The announcement said the next summit was scheduled for Cairo in 1996.

The reactions of the Egyptian businessmen who attended were mixed. "Casablanca was mainly a political affair and we expected the Amman conference to be more business-like," said Mohamed Farid Khamis, president of the Federation of Egyptian Industry. "Unfortunately our hopes have not materialised. Politicians and technocrats dominated the scene."

The businessmen maintained, however, that their target did not run counter to Moussa's statement that regional efforts must address all aspects of the peace process — economic, political and security — on an equal basis.

Although the conference was not intended to be a forum for political debate, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres took a hard-line position on Jerusalem, and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat complained that Gaza had been closed for the major part of the year. There was also a minor verbal squabble between Moussa, who criticised other Arabs for rushing in Israel's direction, and Jordan's King Hussein.

Despite Jordan's overt official normalisation with Israel, the prevailing sentiment among Jordan's business community is that it is still hard to do business with their Israeli counterparts. The attitude of Egyptian businessmen, however, appeared more pragmatic.

Khamis confirmed that members of his federation met with the Israeli Manufacturers Association, on the fringe of the plenary sessions, to discuss obstacles impeding bilateral trade. Also discussed were arrangements for both teams to meet every six months in Taba — without government officials.

The Israelis also considered the conference a success. Israel's private sector took home its first signed deal with Jordan — to produce bromine from the Dead Sea. And the Israeli government signed a much publicised letter of intent to buy natural gas from Qatar through the American Enron Corporation. The deal, said to be worth as much as $4 billion, was the first involving Israel and a Gulf Arab state.

But Ronit Silon, head of the Israeli Young Generation of Industrialists, said: "Our primary interest is with the Egyptians, the Jordanians and the Palestinians because they are close geographically." Silon visited Egypt a year and a half ago along with a group of Israeli manufacturers and will be present at the forthcoming Taba meetings.

Hazem El-Biblawi, in charge of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, said the conference took a major step towards recognising the importance of the private sector by the establishment of the Regional Tourist Board, the Business Council and the Executive Secretariat to be located in Rabat. "Amman recognised that governments cannot remain the only actors," he said.

El-Biblawi believes that the regional bank is a good idea, provided two conditions are met. "First, it should be able to attract additional funds. If it is a matter of reallocation only, then there is no strong case for this mechanism. Other regions already have regional banks," he said. "But this hasn't been possible with the unfavourable conditions in the Middle East.

"Second, the bank must be able to generate funds from within and promote the capital markets in the region. Economic cooperation is much more than financial institutions."

And economic cooperation is also much more than the expansion of the private sector. If anything, the working relationship between Israeli businessmen and some of their Egyptian counterparts is due to the fact that the two countries made peace 17 years ago. The sequence of events in Amman is testimony to the fact that economic cooperation and peace-making are interlinked and, therefore, the scope of peace must be broadened.

Additional reporting by **Nevine Khalil** *in Cairo*

Campaign takes off

Election campaigning is shifting into high gear as the 29 November deadline approaches. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Though campaigning for the 29 November People's Assembly elections was formally launched last Friday, when the Interior Ministry opened its doors for candidates' registration, the streets of Cairo and other major cities and towns are already festooned with posters and streamers. A candidate in Cairo's constituency of Nasr City is doling out free meals of *kebab*. Money, some allege, is changing hands under the table — from candidates to voters, not the other way round.

And fights are breaking out between the supporters of rival candidates. In Toukh, just north of Cairo, a gunfight resulted in the the death of one man and the wounding of three others. And at the village of Atmida, in the Nile Delta, the mayor's house was stoned by his opponent's supporters.

Even in its first week, it was clear that the 1995 campaign, contested vigorously by all the major political parties as well as hordes of independents, contrasted sharply with the lukewarm elections of 1990, which were boycotted by most major political parties.

When the Interior Ministry began accepting nomination papers from candidates last Friday, a record 2,154 came forward. The figure had jumped to 3,034 by Sunday and is expected to reach 4,000 by the time the nomination period ends on 5 November. Candidates will be vying for parliament's 444 seats; and the president of the republic has the constitutional authority to fill 10 other seats by appointment. In contrast, only 2,681 candidates fought the 1990 elections.

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has fielded the largest number of candidates — 439. They include nine cabinet ministers, and such prominent figures as Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the outgoing Assembly, and Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff. The NDP, which held an 80 per cent majority in the outgoing parliament, is expected to win another big victory.

The liberal Wafd Party, under the leadership of Fouad Serageddin, has nominated 175 candidates, a number second only to the NDP. Its list includes Serageddin himself, deputy chairman No'man Gomaa and Secretary-General Saad Fakhri Abdel-Nour. In addition to Abdel-Nour, eight more Copts are on the list, along with three women.

Tagammu, which won five seats in the 1990 elections, has fielded 42 candidates, including party leader Khaled Mohieddin, deputy leader Lutfi Waked, one woman and one Copt.

Forty-four candidates have been nominated by the Democratic Nasserist Party, including party leader Diaeddin Dawoud and journalist Hamdin Sabahi.

The Islamist-oriented Labour Party has around 100 candidates, including party leader Ibrahim Shukri and secretary-general Adel Hussein, plus one Copt, possibly two.

The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood is throwing about 150 of its members into the battle — running as independents. But between 16 and 26 others who are standing trial before a military court have reversed a decision to run for election from behind bars.

(see pp.2&3)



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Sweet of love, rich of praise

Queen Nefertari's final resting place has been restored and will be opened to the public on Saturday, for the first time since its discovery almost a century ago. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports from Luxor

The dust has been removed, the plaster walls are once again secure and the vivid shades of blue, red and green, accentuated by a striking use of black and white, have re-emerged. Nefertari's elegant figure still adorns her newly-pristine tomb in the Valley of the Queens on the Nile's west bank opposite Luxor, as it has done for the past 32 centuries.

On Saturday 4 November, the tomb of the favourite wife of Pharaoh Ramses II will be opened to the public for the first time since its discovery in 1904 by the Italian archaeologist Ernesto Schiaparelli.

Work was continuing at fever pitch yesterday as last-minute preparations were being made in and around the tomb. A wooden floor has been added in the front and burial chambers, to prevent dust from rising as visitors walk in, thus damaging the walls.

Abdel-Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, has issued directives that a maximum of 150 visitors per day will be allowed inside the tomb, in groups of 15 and at 10-minute intervals. And to protect the inscriptions, visitors will be required to wear a foot cover and masks over their noses.

The entrance fee will be $35 for foreigners and LE5 for Egyptians. During the past week, a large number of tourists have visited the area to inquire about the opening date.



photo: Sherif Sombol

"This is one of the very few tombs in Egypt which is rich both in its scenes and vivid colours," said Sabri Abdel-Aziz, chief antiquities inspector for the west bank. "Even after 32 centuries have passed, it looks as if the painter has just finished his work."

Abdel-Aziz said the tomb was much more than a burial place. "It was an avenue for eternal life; the images and inscriptions on the tomb's walls were meant to ensure resurrection and a home among the gods for Queen Nefertari," he said.

For the best part of this century, experts have pondered on how to keep the wall paintings — considered by many archaeologists as the finest in any ancient tomb — from turning to dust. The disintegrating plasterwork had left the tomb in a precarious condition.

After several false starts, the then Egyptian Antiquities Organisation (EAO), in cooperation with the Getty Conservation Institute of the United States, embarked in 1986 on an ambitious plan to preserve what EAO chairman Ahmed Qadri, described as "one of the most beautiful masterpieces of our patrimony".

The restoration work involved re-plastering and fixing the colours and inscriptions which feature religious rituals and scenes from everyday life during the 19th Dynasty reign of Ramses II.

"The principles of minimal intervention and reversibility of materials were strictly observed," a restorer, who has worked on the tomb for five years, said. "We did not add colour. It was cleaning and consolidation."

One of the most famous queens of ancient Egypt, Nefertari was, for over 20 years, the beloved queen of Ramses II, whose reign marked the peak of Egyptian imperial power. She held many official titles, including "the lady of two lands," "lady of charm, sweet of love, and rich of praise".

When the tomb was unearthed by Schiaparelli, it contained nothing but several fragments of the queen's pink granite sarcophagus and a few other small artifacts. The tomb's treasures had been plundered by grave robbers. But the miraculous wall paintings remained.

Although the restoration of the tomb, at a cost of $6 million, is complete, the Nefertari project is not.

Environmental monitoring of the tomb's interior will be maintained. Ultra-modern devices have been installed inside to measure humidity, salt levels and temperature. "This will provide us with additional data on the effect which visitors have on the tomb's environment," explained antiquities inspector Mohamed El-Biali. "Human breath inside the tomb may raise humidity levels, which would reactivate the salt in the limestone and thus restart the crystallisation process."

This is why the number of visitors has to be limited. "You cannot have unlimited access, unlimited hours and unlimited numbers of visitors," El-Biali continued. Some think that 150 visitors per day is still too many.

A French archaeologist who visited the tomb recently at the request of the Ministry of Culture recommended that only two people should be allowed into the tomb every day.

But many visitors, like Britain's Sharon Noamah, have been waiting for years for the tomb to open. "I was here in 1992 and I have been coming back and forth and kept praying for the tomb to open," she said. "I have been to many tombs but I think this is the finest of them all. It demonstrates Ramses' love for his wife and I don't think any tourist coming to Egypt should miss out on visiting it."




Halabi Hetata Abu-Reeda




Hefzi Elwi Afifi

Top brass reshuffle

IN A major reshuffle of top armed forces commanders, Lt. Gen. Magdi Hetata, commander of the Republican Guard, was elevated on Monday to chief-of-staff of the armed forces, reports **Galal Nassar**. Hetata replaced Lt. Gen. Salah Halabi, who became board chairman of the Arab Industrialisation Authority, the group which administers a major sector of the national military industry.

The appointments, which have been approved by President Hosni Mubarak, were announced following a meeting between the President and Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, which was later joined by Halabi.

Hetata, whose men were credited with saving Mubarak's life from last June's assassination attempt in Addis Ababa, was honoured by the President following his return to Cairo and promoted to lieutenant-general. His elevation to chief-of-staff of the armed forces had been widely expected.

A 1961 graduate of the Military Academy, Hetata previously served as commander of a mechanised infantry division attached to the second army, chief-of-staff of the western military zone and commander of the second army.

Halabi, who graduated from the Military Academy in 1956, was commander of an infantry brigade in the 1973 war. He later served as commander of a mechanised infantry division, chief-of-staff of the third army, and commander of the third army. He later led Egyptian troops who took part in the war for the liberation of Kuwait, and his distinguished performance earned him praise from other commanders of the US-led military coalition. As a result, he was promoted to lieutenant-general, awarded the military star and promoted to chief-of-staff of the armed forces. In moving to the Arab Industrialisation Authority, Halabi replaced Lt. Gen. Ibrahim El-Orabi, who has retired.

The reshuffle also included the appointment of Maj. Gen. Saad Abu-Reeda as chief of military operations. Previously, as commander of the second army, he was responsible for introducing the ultra-modern, locally-assembled American M1-A1 tank into service. An armoured brigade, using this tank exclusively, took part in several live ammunition exercises.

Maj. Gen. Mustafa Afifi, previously chief of the armed forces training authority, was appointed as the new republican guard commander.

Maj. Gen. Ahab Elwi, previously chief of military operations, was appointed as assistant to the defence minister. Maj. Gen. Ali Hefzi, previously commander of the military police, was also made assistant to the defence minister. Maj. Gen. Medhat Abdel-Rahman is the new military police commander.

Maj. Gen. Ali Maher, chief-of-staff of the second army, has *been promoted to second army commander*, replacing Abu-Reeda.

Scanty protest at Press Syndicate

A sit-in protest at the Press Syndicate attracted a limited number of journalists. **Nevine Khalil** reports

Tens of journalists staged a three-hour sit-in last Saturday at the downtown headquarters of the Press Syndicate to protest the government's decision to try one journalist in a military court and prosecute another on the basis of the controversial Law 93. But participants expressed disappointment at the low turn-out, which contrasted sharply with other protest action conducted by journalists during the past months, since the issue of Law 93 last May.

Salah Abdel-Maqsoud, a member of the syndicate's council and a writer for *Al-Liwa Al-Islami*, a newspaper promoting Islamist thought, was arrested at Cairo airport two weeks ago as he prepared to board a plane for Istanbul. He is facing a military trial on charges of publishing anti-government and pro-Muslim Brotherhood propaganda.

Magdi Hussein, editor of *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, will stand trial on 15 November before a misdemeanours court on charges of libel. Hussein, who is accused of slandering Alaa El-Alfi, son of Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, is the first journalist against whom Law 93 of 1995 has been invoked. This law, which is strongly opposed by the syndicate, provides harsh penalties for the publication of false or malicious news.

A statement released by the syndicate during the sit-in protested against what it termed Abdel-Maqsoud's "abduction" from Cairo airport and the government's decision to try him in a military court. It also objected to the prosecution of Hussein on the basis of the "dubious" Law 93.

The statement, vowing that journalists would back their colleagues to the hilt, said civilians should not be put on trial before military courts because this involves the armed services in internal political conflicts. The statement also reiterated journalists' insistence that Law 93 be repealed.

As four police trucks were positioned across the road from the syndicate, a loudspeaker churned out denunciations of military trials and Law 93. A few passers-by stopped to listen.

Hussein was joined at the protest by the editors-in-chief of other opposition newspapers, including *Al-Wafd*'s Gamal Badawi and *Al-Ahali*'s Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, and six members of the syndicate's council. Ironically, Islamist protesters were outnumbered by leftists.

Wearing a *khemar* (a lengthy veil), Abdel-Maqsoud's wife, also a journalist, took her five young children to the syndicate to join the protest over her husband's arrest. The five Abdel-Maqsoud children roamed the syndicate grounds, carrying placards emblazoned with "What is my father's crime?" and "Where's daddy? I want daddy."

NDP launches campaign

A closely guarded secret till the last minute, the NDP's list of candidates for the forthcoming elections has finally been released. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reviews the list










Sorour Wali Metwalli El-Shazli El-Sherif Gweili Mahgoub Osman Azmi Ghamrawi Emara

After a long delay, the National Democratic Party announced last Thursday that it was fielding 439 candidates in the 29 November elections. Five out of parliament's 444 elected seats, will thus remain uncontested by the ruling party. The announcement was made by Kamal El-Shazli, the NDP's assistant secretary-general, a mere 24 hours before nomination applications were due to be filed with the Interior Ministry.

The five uncontested seats are for *fe'at* (professionals — each constituency elects two MPs, a worker or peasant and a professional) in the constituencies of Dekerness in the governorate of Daqahliya, Rahmaniya in the governorate of Beheira, Al-Saff in the governorate of Giza, Gamaliya in Cairo and Abu Kebir in Sharqiya Governorate.

Three NDP deputies representing Dekerness, Rahmaniya and Al-Saff in the outgoing People's Assembly were stripped of their parliamentary immunity two months ago and questioned by prosecution officials in connection with alleged financial malpractices.

The Dekerness deputy, Tawfik Abdou Ismail, who headed the Assembly's budget and planning committee was said to have used his position as chairman of the Commerical Bank of Daqahliya to grant as much as LE400 million in loans to the Rahmaniya deputy, Khaled Mahmoud, and the Al-Saff deputy, Mahmoud Azzam.

According to a Central Bank report, the loans were contracted without adequate collateral and at the expense of the bank's cash liquidity. By refusing to contest their seats, the NDP has given these people a greater chance of success if they decide to run as independents.

In Gamaliya, the NDP has not fielded a candidate due to the recent death of Saber Eissa, its old-time member for this constituency. And in Abu Kebir, the NDP is alleged to have dropped Helmi Nammar, chairman of the Syndicate of Commerce Graduates, when Mohamed El-Alfi, cousin to Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, decided to run for the same seat.

El-Shazli said the NDP was nominating nine cabinet ministers, including six who were members of the outgoing Assembly. The veterans are: Youssef Wali, minister of agriculture and the NDP's secretary-general, who is running in Ibshway (Fayoum); Amal Osman, minister of social affairs, in Dokki (Giza); Maher Abaza, minister of power, in Tilien (Sharqiya); Suleiman Metwalli, minister of transport and communications, in Qweissna (Menoufiya); Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) in Al-Tibbin (Helwan); and Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, in Bagour (Menoufiya).

The cabinet members who were not part of the outgoing Assembly were named as: Ahmed Gweili, minister of supply, in Giza; Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of local administration, in Mansoura (Daqahliya); and Mohamed El-Ghamrawi, minister of state for military production, in Helwan.

The NDP's list of candidates also includes seven women, compared to four in the 1990 elections. They are: Amal Osman in Giza, Fayda Kamel in Khalifa (Cairo), Soraya Labna in Nasr City (Cairo), Sawsan Kilani in Ismailia, Widad Shalabi in Attarin (Alexandria) and Fardos El-Awdan in Kafr Al-Sheikh.

As in 1990, the NDP's list of candidates does not include a single Copt — a situation which is likely to be exploited by the opposition parties, particularly the Wafd.

El-Shazli said that "new faces" make up 35 per cent of this year's list, compared to 50 per cent in 1990. Two hundred and ninety members of the outgoing Assembly are listed as well, but 114 NDP figures, including 87 members of the outgoing Assembly, had their applications turned down by the party. Angry, around 90 of them have announced that they will run as independents, regardless of the NDP's threat to expel them from the party.

They include Ahmed El-Hefni, a former chairman of the Supreme Constitutional Court, who strongly opposed a number of laws in the last Assembly, who will run in Daqahliya. Wagiha El-Zalabani, who had retained her seat in the outgoing Assembly despite a ruling by the Court of Cassation that her election was rigged, will be running in Damanhour.

An analytical study by Ahmed Kamal El-Qadi, a researcher at the People's Assembly, showed that in 1990 only 260 NDP candidates out of a total of 444, a percentage of 58.5, managed to win seats in the house. But the NDP majority jumped to 80 per cent after 95 NDP members who failed to win the party's nomination ran as independents, and won, later rejoining party ranks. The NDP had allowed them back into the party despite earlier threats to drop their membership.

The same threat was made by El-Shazli last Thursday. "Those who run for election as independents against other NDP candidates should know that they will be expelled from the party," he said. However, El-Qadi's study anticipated that the same scenario would be repeated in this year's elections.

As the NDP and other parties announced the names of their candidates, there were signs that the election battle was heating up.

In the town of Toukh in the governorate of Qalyubiya, a confrontation between the supporters of NDP candidate Adel Sidki, brother of Prime Minister Atef Sidki, and Attiya El-Fayoumi, an NDP member running independently, exploded into a fight that left one person dead and three others seriously injured.

In the Cairo constituency of Dokki, NDP candidate Amal Osman, minister of social affairs, is bracing for an uphill struggle against Maamoun El-Hodeibi, a prominent figure in the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

In Nasr City, NDP candidate Abdel-Moneim Emara, chairman of the Higher Council for Youth and Sports, is facing strong opposition from Adel Hussein, secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. The rivalry has triggered an anti-Emara campaign in the opposition press, with *Al-Shaab*, Labour's mouthpiece, accusing him of corruption, and *Al-Wafd* alleging that he had illegally registered 14,000 of his supporters as voters in the constituency.

And in Helwan, Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), is challenged by Mustafa Bakri, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahrar*, the Liberal Party's newspaper.

But the outcome of the battle in two other Cairo constituencies appears to have already been decided in the NDP's favour. Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the outgoing Assembly, appears confident that he will carry Al-Sayeda Zeinab, while Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff, faces little opposition in Zeitoun.

Political analyst Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, asked for his assessment of the NDP list, commented: "We cannot say that the NDP has a platform in the technical sense of the word because the main role of NDP candidates is to absorb any adverse effects of government policies. This is why I cannot say that the NDP list has any particular significance, apart from the fact that the candidates were chosen on the basis of their popularity and ability to play the required role of absorbing these adverse effects."

Brotherhood-Jihad connection charged

In a continuing crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, two Islamists were arrested for allegedly liaising between the outlawed organisation and the militant Jihad group

As the military trial of 49 Muslim Brotherhood figures continued, security forces delivered another blow to the outlawed organisation by arresting one of its leading members in Suez, for alleged connections with a London-based leader of the militant Jihad group. A member of Jihad was also arrested in Suez on similar charges and the two were remanded in custody for 15 days pending trial.

According to information released by the Interior Ministry, Abdel-Wahhab Sharafeddin, the owner of *a shipping agency in Suez and a Brotherhood member*, was instructed by his superiors to travel to London in mid-1994 to establish contact with Yasser Tawfiq El-Serri, a member of Jihad who had been sentenced to death in absentia for masterminding an abortive attempt on the life of Prime Minister Atef Sidki. Sharafeddin was to pass on directives for carrying out acts of subversion issued by El-Serri to local Jihad militants, Interior Ministry sources claimed.

Sharafeddin returned to Suez last May and was placed under police surveillance, which, the police say, revealed that he was using facilities at his shipping agency to receive El-Serri's instructions. Those directives were passed on, in turn, to Hilmi Eissa Azazi, a social insurance official described as a member of Jihad, the sources added. Police raided the shipping agency and arrested both Sharafeddin and Azazi. A few minutes before their arrest, the Interior Ministry said, a "provocative" statement issued by Jihad's office in London for distribution inside Egypt arrived at the agency by fax.

Officials said El-Serri had left Egypt in 1988 for Yemen, where he ran an information office for Jihad, before moving to London.

A statement by the Brotherhood described the accusations directed at Sharafeddin and Azazi as "fabricated, false and with no basis in truth... It is ironic that the only evidence against them is that a telefax machine and a computer were seized at Sharafeddin's office as if having this equipment was a crime."

The arrest of Sharafeddin was not the first time that a Brotherhood figure has been accused of having connections with the militant Jihad and Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya groups. Since 1992, when documents allegedly proving these connections were seized at the Salsabil computer company, many Brotherhood figures have been rounded up on similar charges.

As the trial of 49 Brotherhood members continued before the Supreme Military Court on Monday, their defence lawyers argued that the court had no jurisdiction to hear the case and walked out in protest. Lawyer Selim El-Awwa, describing the case as "political and not criminal", said it should have been heard by a state security court.

Backing El-Awwa, Ahmed El-Khawaga, chairman of the Bar Association, said: "After we ascertained that this is a strictly political case and that we cannot exercise the duty of defence, and after the court turned down our demands, we had no choice but to walk out."

The lawyers also argued that as they had contested the jurisdiction of the military court before the Supreme Constitutional Court, the military trial should have been stopped.

"The defence, after performing its duty of pointing out that the military court has no jurisdiction to hear the case, cannot continue to discharge its responsibilities... because they have no relation to the political dispute that prompted the government to put the accused on a military trial in order to realise its political objectives," the lawyers said in a statement.

One of the defendants, Dr Essam El-Iryan, secretary-general of the Doctors Syndicate, asked the court not to commission other defence lawyers to take up the case. "What the defence lawyers have pointed out already is quite enough," he said, adding that the defendants did not wish to appear before the court again.

El-Iryan read out a statement on behalf of the defendants in which he announced that a number of them — said to range between 16 and 25 — have reconsidered their decision to contest the November elections. "From the very beginning, during interrogation and during the trial, we have said repeatedly that the principal objective of this case is to keep us apart from our constituents," El-Iryan said.

"We repeatedly asked the authorities to show neutrality in the election process by referring us to a civilian court and ordering our release pending the trial, leaving the decision to be taken by the people in free elections," he continued. "But the court did not respond to our demand and we remain in detention."

According to El-Iryan, the detainees had been asked to contest the elections from behind bars by human right activists as well as political and intellectual figures. "But there is a big difference between an imprisoned candidate, whose supporters are liable to be suppressed if they campaign for him, and a candidate who has full freedom... We apologise for not being able to contest the elections, but pledge that we will continue to work for the people."

After an hour-long recess, the presiding judge announced that another panel of lawyers would be commissioned to defend the accused and that the trial would continue. He also ordered that 22 of the accused, who had been freed by prosecution authorities before the military hearings began, be re-arrested.

Election watchdog in dispute

In a move described as unprecedented, and possibly unconstitutional, a group of intellectuals and human rights activists are setting up an election watch commission. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

More than 100 academics, human rights activists, former diplomats and former ministers have got together to set up an election watch commission to monitor the birth pangs of the new People's Assembly.

The establishment of the Independent Commission for Election Review, the first of its kind in Egyptian parliamentary history, came a few weeks after the government rejected a proposal by some opposi*tion parties to invite international* observers to witness the 29 November ballot.

"There will be no interference from the commission in the work of the Interior Ministry or the judges," assured its chairman, Said El-Naggar. "The commission will report on facts and witness a new People's Assembly in the making."

According to the commission's secretary-general, Saadeddin Ibrahim: "We are basically a self-initiating and regulating group. We are not breaking any laws but since outside observation was rejected by the government, then why not form a national group to do what an international team of observers would have done?"

The commission issued a statement urging President Hosni Mubarak to support this "initiative" and demanding easy access to all data related to the elections. The commission was established, the statement said, because the exchange of charges and counter-charges between the government and the opposition had "baffled" public opinion.

The statement insisted that the commission "is not part of the political process, but is committed to conducting a fair and objective election watch".

However, for Kamal El-Qadi, a former Interior Ministry official and expert on the Egyptian electoral system, the setting up of this commission, is not only unprecedented but also unconstitutional. "The idea of having outside observers runs counter to the Constitution, which includes the guarantees necessary for a free election," he said. "There is no article in the Constitution that permits the presence of observers." Parliamentary elections, he continued, are called by an act of sovereignty (presidential decree), and "even a national commission is not entitled to supervise the election process".

At its first preparatory meeting earlier this week, the commission decided to set up five committees with different functions: the first to keep an eye on violations; the second to receive complaints from voters and candidates; the third to monitor any legal loopholes in the election process; the fourth to issue a weekly update to voters that "would help them make the right choice"; and the fifth to carry out field *work in 30 constituencies*.

According to insiders, differences emerged among members on the scope of the commission's task. The Ibn Khaldoun Research Centre, headed by Saadeddin Ibrahim insisted that the commission should supervise the election in a similar way to international observation teams, meaning that it should keep an eye on what is going on inside polling and vote-counting stations. But other founders — including the Civic Forum, headed by Said El-Naggar, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights and the Legal Aid Centre for Human Rights — argued that the commission should confine itself to observation and documentation, probably from the outside.

Mahmoud Kassem, a former Arab League diplomat and a founding member, suggested that the commission's work should include a review of the voters' lists and field work in the various constituencies to ascertain that there was no interference from security authorities. "Our mission will be to observe, follow up and document the election process," he said. "If this mission is accomplished, perhaps we will have a larger role to play in the future. But we want to make it known that we are not taking sides."

For this reason, the commission will not accept any governmental or partisan funding, according to chairman El-Naggar. The commission's work will be financed by an LE56,000 budget, entirely donated by member organisations and individuals. Most expenditure will be on the field work survey.

According to Secretary-General Ibrahim, the commission will issue next week what he described as "an electoral code of ethics which will set rules and regulations for all parties contesting the elections as well as the government, the candidates and, most importantly, the voters."

Heavy toll in Al-Minya's killing fields

The vicious circle of violence and counter-violence remains unbroken in the southern governorate of Al-Minya and, according to its new security chief, an end may not be in sight. **Dina Ezzat** reports



The confrontation between security forces and the militants of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya has been raging on and off for over 15 months in the southern governorate of Al-Minya. Hardly a week passes without the Interior Ministry releasing news about a fresh outbreak of violence, in which persons from both sides, as well as innocent civilians, are either killed or wounded.

"The confrontation has to continue until we rid the governorate of all those terrorists," asserted Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, the *new security chief of the troubled province. Abdel-Gawad, in* charge for a little over a month, is the second police officer to take this post this year and the third since violence erupted over 15 months ago.

"We are working very hard to restore security and stability to Al-Minya, but I cannot say that the situation will go back to normal overnight," Abdel-Gawad told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview. He said the local security forces were facing serious challenges.

"For one thing, there are thousands of feddans of sugar cane cultivation throughout the governorate where terrorists hide to launch attacks against police, soldiers and civilians," he continued. Although these areas are frequently raided by police, "it is impossible to stop the terrorists from hiding there". In some parts of the governorate, planting sugar cane alongside the highway running through southern Egypt has been banned.

Another problem facing security forces is the militant groups' easy access to weapons and money. According to Abdel-Gawad, "The forces have confiscated large amounts of weapons, but they [the militants] always seem to have more."

According to the Interior Ministry, at least 300 people have died in the violence and counter-violence during the past 15 months. The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) has condemned the militant groups for the random killing of policemen and those suspected of being police agents. It also blamed security forces for shooting suspects who attempt to escape when facing arrest, and appealed to the forces to "set an example by sticking to the law".

One of the major flashpoints in the province has been the town of Mallawi — scene of some of the bloodiest confrontations. For over a year, the town has lived under a night curfew that has only been eased occasionally for a few hours.

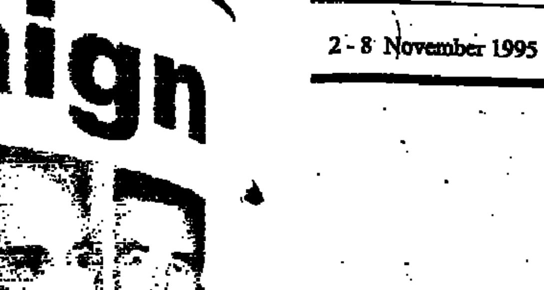
Abdel-Gawad does not expect the curfew to be lifted for several *months. "The curfew is in force to protect the lives of innocent ci*vilians," he said. "And as long as we know that there are terrorists hiding around the town, we are not going to take the risk of lifting it."

The inhabitants of Mallawi have complained that, with educational institutions and public services running irregularly, the curfew prevents them from leading a normal life. But security forces insist that "people are much safer this way".

According to the security chief, the reason Mallawi has been such a flashpoint is its vast surrounding areas of sugar cane cultivation. "I really think that the Ministry of Agriculture should help us with this problem," he said. Abdel-Gawad suggested that the planting of sugar cane should be prohibited "for at least a year", or that it should be planted in smaller plots of land that are not adjacent to each other.

Political analysts and human rights groups have repeatedly warned that the cycle of violence and counter-violence cannot be broken by security measures alone.





Realism on the left

In the fourth instalment of a series on the political parties contesting the November elections, **Khaled Dawoud** and **Nermeen El-Nawawi** review the history of the leftist Tagammu Party, interview its leader Khaled Mohieddin and seek the views of experts on the party's performance

"Freedom, socialism and unity" has been the slogan of the National Progressive Unionist Party, widely known as Al-Tagammu (Rally), since its establishment under the leadership of Khaled Mohieddin in 1976. But bowing to political reality, this slogan has been quietly dropped from the party's 1995 election campaign, and replaced by: "Change in response to the people's will — against oppression, corruption and terrorism; for justice, progress and democracy."

"We have to be *practical and realistic*," said the party's secretary-general Rifaat El-Said. "We cannot call for socialism at this stage because we do not have a clear definition of the term or how it could be applied."

Party sources agree that Tagammu lost some of its credibility, and was forced to reconsider its policies, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which, they say, signified the "collapse of socialism". Another factor that contributed to the shift in the party's position was the American-shepherded Middle East peace process, leading to the 1993 peace agreement between Israel and the PLO.

Tagammu, which was a strong opponent of the late President Anwar El-Sadat, has even been accused of clinching a deal with the government to jointly oppose radical Islamist groups, which both view as a major threat to the nation's stability.

"There are changes on the ground," El-Said, a one-time member of the underground communist movement, said. "There are new political realities, mainly the growth of terrorist groups who use Islam as a cover. Every Egyptian has to confront them strongly."

But, El-Said explains, "this does not mean that we have scaled down our opposition to the government. We do not have to choose between the government and the terrorists. We can provide a third alternative."

However, El-Said said the exercise of opposition "depends on the changing political conditions and the way the government treats us. We cannot deal with [President Hosni] Mubarak in the same way we used to deal with Sadat. Sadat suppressed us fiercely. But as this is no longer the case, we have to change too."

Hussein Abdel-Razek, a member of Tagammu's central committee and the head of its political section, acknowledged that the party had lost much of its appeal, as well as many of its prominent members. Within party ranks, he said, members were divided on the approach they should take towards the government, with some expressing fears that closer ties with the regime could undermine the party's position.

"There is definitely a trend towards a more practical approach," Abdel-Razek said. "We can no longer call for nationalisation or oppose privatisation."

According to El-Said, Abdel-Razek and Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin, the "third alternative" for which the party will campaign in the approaching elections is "democracy" and the "necessity of change in accordance with the people's will".

Reflecting this "realistic" policy, Tagammu is nominating only 40 candidates in 16 governorates, leaving more than 400 parliamentary seats uncontested. This strategy of nominating a limited number of candidates who have a good chance of success was used by the party in the 1990 elections.

According to El-Said, the party's main problem is finance. Its election campaign will depend on donations by party members as well as the candidates themselves. "The party will not be able to spend more than LE200,000 to support its 40 candidates. But we will depend on the skills of our members and the services they can provide," he said.

Mohieddin denied that Tagammu was involved in any sort of coordination with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), or with Islamic groups or their sympathisers — an allusion to the Labour Party. "The only coordination we have is with the Nasserists, and we have not ruled out the possibility of coordination with the Wafd," he said.

Mohieddin said he expected between 10 and 15 Tagammu candidates to make it to the Assembly.

History

Tagammu was first established as the leftist platform in the Arab Socialist Union — then the nation's sole political party — in 1975. One year later, in 1976, Sadat allowed the Union's three wings — right, left and centre — to become full-fledged parties. Tagammu projected itself as a coalition of leftists, including Nasserists, Marxists and Arab nationalists.

A 123-member founding committee held its first meeting on 10 April 1976 and elected a 29-member general secretariat with Khaled Mohieddin as its chairman. But from the very beginning, there were divisions between the Marxists and the Nasserists, with both groups vying to shape the party's policy and fighting for its top positions. While the divisions did not lead to the party's disintegration, the leftist groups within Tagammu nevertheless continued to maintain their independent organisations outside its framework.

According to experts and insiders, Tagammu managed to survive because its members, more often than not, maintained a minimum of cohesion and, in times of crisis, chairman Mohieddin stepped in to play the arbiter. Mohieddin, a leading member of the Free Officers Movement which overthrew the monarchy in 1952, remains highly respected by party members.

The broad lines of the agreement reached by the party's founding members were: a positive assessment of the July 1952 Revolution and its leader, Gamal Abdel-Nasser; strong opposition to imperialism and Zionism; joint struggle to defend national independence, including respect for democratic rights and freedoms, respect for revealed religions, and building a socialist society that is free of exploitation; upholding Egypt's Arab identity, the struggle for Arab unity and support of the Palestinian resistance.

However, as a result of the divisions between Nasserists and Marxists, many members left the party, and there was a widespread belief that Tagammu's existence would come to an end if the Nasserists and communists were allowed to function legally as independent political parties.

Yet Tagammu survived, despite the establishment of the Arab Democratic Nasserist party in 1992.

Tagammu perhaps owes its survival to the fact that its leaders believe it would be best for leftists to present a united front if the left is to regain some of its lost strength and popularity.

From the party's establishment in 1976 and until Sadat's death in October 1981, Tagammu adopted a hard line in opposing the government, which reacted by rounding up some of its members and confiscating some issues of its mouthpiece, *Al-Ahali*, later shutting it down. The party also came under fire in the national press, which labelled it as communist.

With Mubarak's rise to power, a new chapter was opened, but greater government tolerance was insufficient to bring the party into the limelight of Egyptian politics.

In the 1984 elections, Tagammu won 4.2 per cent of the national vote but this dropped three years later to 2.2 per cent.

The fall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union has certainly been the greatest blow. Mohieddin said he believed the party survived this blow because of its support for a true democracy and a multi-party system. With poverty on the increase in Egypt, he added, there would always be a need for a party that advocates social justice and protecting the rights of the poor.

Tagammu was the only opposition party that contested the 1990 elections. At the time, party officials said they could not miss any opportunity for getting in contact with the public to prove that the left was still alive. Tagammu nominated 33 candidates and five of them found their way to parliament.

Platform

The party's 1995 election platform claims that the country has reached a dead end as a result of the government's policy. Finding a way out depends on the people's will to change. According to Tagammu, the government's economic reform programme has caused widespread unemployment, a widening gap between classes, corruption, a deterioration of public services, rising debts and suppression of basic freedoms.

The solutions it recommends are: building up an independent national economy; promoting democracy and the change of government through the ballot box; justice in the distribution of national income and services; combating corruption; promoting enlightenment and tolerance; protecting national unity; and adopting an independent foreign policy based on the interests of Egypt and the Arab world.

The programme emphasises the need for a comprehensive change that gives priority to the interests of the under-privileged. It strongly opposes the withdrawal of the state from the public services sector, particularly health, education and housing. It also calls for reforming and restructuring the public sector, but there is no mention of opposition to its privatisation.



photo: Yves Paris

Seeking a new style

Dubbed "the red major" by the Western press, Khaled Mohieddin was a leading member of the Free Officers Movement that overthrew the monarchy in July 1952. After the downfall of King Farouk, Mohieddin became a member of a 12-man Revolution Command Council that was established to run state affairs and steer the transition to a new republican regime.

But his membership of this collective leadership was short-lived. He resigned in 1954 as a result of differences with Gamal Abdel-Nasser and the rest of the Command Council over the choice between a democratic or an authoritarian system of government. Having backed the democratic option, and failed, he went into self-imposed exile in Europe.

At the end of 1955, he was invited back to Egypt by Abdel-Nasser to launch a leftist evening newspaper, Al-Messa. *He was dismissed from his post as the newspaper's editor-in-chief in 1958, after* Al-Messa *supported Iraq's Abdel-Karim Qassem.*

In 1976, Mohieddin established the Tagammu Party and has remained its leader since then. Representing the constituency of his native village, Kafr Shukr, in the 1990-1995 People's Assembly, Mohieddin was also leader of the parliamentary opposition. Now 73, he is the only member of the Revolution Command Council to have remained active in politics.

How are the approaching elections different from previous ones?

A large number of political parties are contesting these elections at a time when the nation is facing several crises: the crisis of terrorism, the economic crisis, the crisis of the press law.

And although the government says that the economic difficulties are behind us, we believe that the social, economic and political conditions remain harsh. There are many real conflicts which will be reflected in the election battle.

How will these differences affect the Tagammu Party?

There are new problems and issues that must be dealt with. In the 1984 elections, the problem of unemployment had not yet been felt as strongly, and terrorism was not rampant.

Now, terrorism reflects a crisis in society, an ideological and social crisis. The public sector had not been privatised either. At that time, we spoke of the public sector as an economic bulwark, but now it is being liquidated.

New issues have imposed themselves and they need to be addressed.

Many people believe that Tagammu's policy underwent a basic change in 1990, when the party decided to contest the elections of that year, which other parties boycotted. How true is this?

Some people believe that the fact that we took part in those elections means that we are no longer really in opposition. But we certainly take an opposition position in parliament.

We opposed the government's policy statements, we opposed the state budget, we opposed all the basic laws, including the public sector law, the professional syndicates law and the press law.

But we were a minority in parliament and, in order to make our voice heard, we had to use a new method of opposition. We did not explode issues, but we took positions on issues.

How was the party affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union?

How can you preach socialism to the people after the collapse of world socialism? You have to go on speaking to the people about social justice and curtailing capitalism. But you must speak in a new style that is in line with the new situation.

This is why some people think that we modified our programme. But we have not changed, we have not renounced any of our basic ideas, such as social justice. *We are dealing with them in a way that is in* line with the new situation.

Is Tagammu projecting itself as a party that is democratic and progressive rather than socialist?

No, we are a socialist party. Socialism is our principal objective but this is not the time to deal with it.

When Tagammu was established in 1976, it was a coalition of leftists. But now that the Nasserists have their own party, what is the structural framework of Tagammu?

Tagammu includes Nasserists, Marxists, the enlightened religious trend that is democratic and socialist, and Arab nationalists. These groups could not survive together if they did not cooperate. But this does not negate the right of all forces to have their own independent parties. We have cooperated closely with the Nasserist Party since its establishment.

Does Tagammu have an independent ideology?

Of course. We have our own platform that accommodates all leftist trends. Ideologically speaking, Tagammu is a coalition, but since we have a platform, it is also a party.

How do you assess Tagammu's success hitherto?

We have not faced any major divisions or internal crises. But society's move to the right is a different story. We are at some distance from the public because, from the beginning, we did not suggest a specific form of socialism.

How is Tagammu different from the other political parties?

We act according to a specific programme. We are the only party in Egypt that has published a programme. We always commit ourselves to a programme.

Unlike the Italian communist party, which managed to raise sufficient funds to run its election campaign, Tagammu has not succeeded in winning over Egyptian businessmen. Why?

Because of a misunderstanding of Tagammu's position on the private sector. Tagammu is not against the private sector, but it supports the productive private sector. We are opposed to the parasitic enterprises which the government encourages.

A second reason is the leftist ideology of Tagammu. Our party is on the side of workers, peasants and low-income groups. We oppose exploitation, parasitism and monopolies.

What are the party's sources of finance?

Donations, mainly from national capitalists, who do not exploit the masses.

What is Tagammu's strength in the coming elections?

If the elections are not rigged, we'll get 10 per cent of the vote.

Doesn't this bother you?

We are a socialist party that is preoccupied with ideology and not with elections.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Firebrand tamed

Banned repeatedly and then shut down by President Sadat for fiercely opposing his policies, *Al-Ahali* has toned down its criticism of the government. Critics say it lost a large section of its readership as a result

The weekly *Al-Ahali*, mouthpiece of Tagammu, is not the same newspaper which first appeared in February 1978. The red banner headlines on its front page have become more subdued over the past few years, and the newspaper's layout was changed, putting a greater emphasis on news rather than party positions.

At its birth, the political climate was hostile to to the left. President Anwar El-Sadat held them responsible for the January 1977 food riots, and the confrontation between leftists and the government assumed even larger proportions when Sadat visited Jerusalem at the end of the same year, triggering an opposition outcry.

Nearly four months after *Al-Ahali* first came out, two successive issues were confiscated. On 1 June 1978, Sadat passed a new law on "protecting the domestic front and social peace", imposing restrictions on the activities of opposition parties. Tagammu reacted by suspending the publication of *Al-Ahali*.

But under pressure from Tagammu members, the newspaper resumed publication on 12 July 1978. Only 11 issues were published before Sadat shut it down on 25 October. Out of these 11 issues, seven were confiscated. The newspaper was not allowed to re-appear until May 1982, seven months after Sadat's assassination.

Hussein Abdel-Razek, a member of the newspaper's first editorial board and later its editor-in-chief for six years, said the first eight months of *Al-Ahali*'s history were its "most glorious". During that period, he said, the newspaper's circulation ranged between 80,000 and 120,000, "and it could have been even larger, were it not for our financial problems".

The 1982 appointment of Abdel-Razek, a communist, as the newspaper's editor, triggered controversy inside the party. Several members argued the appointment would confirm the government's allegations that Tagammu was a front for communists.

Abdel-Razek, described as hawkish, used almost every issue of *Al-Ahali* to highlight opposition to the government within the country, giving prominence to anti-government protests, particularly those by workers and peasants.

Abdel-Razek's critics accuse him of giving precedence to his ideological commitments over nationalist sentiment. One striking example was a series of articles he published following a visit to Afghanistan, praising the then-current Soviet occupation of that Muslim country. Like all leading Tagammu figures, Abdel-Razek offered to resign more than once when his editorial policy faced opposition. His resignation was finally accepted in May 1988.

The working relationship between the newspaper's editor-in-chief and the party's leadership has been marked by tension since *Al-Ahali*'s earliest days, over the issue of whether the newspaper should be an accurate reflection of party policy. The newspaper's staff often complained of interference from the party leadership, and in official party meetings, members would complain that certain articles should not have been published because they did not represent the party's viewpoint.

Abdel-Razek's removal appeared to be an attempt by Tagammu to project a new image. The newspaper became less sensational and its language more subdued under his successors, the late Philip Gallab and then Mahmoud El-Maraghi.

By then, the newspaper's circulation had dropped to 15,000 at a time when other opposition newspapers such as *Al-Wafd* and *Al-Shaab* were gaining a wider readership. Many of *Al-Ahali*'s prominent writers stopped contributing, compounding the newspaper's apparently insoluble problem of how to win over professional journalists in return for meagre salaries.

The shrinking popularity of Tagammu itself also contributed to the decline of the newspaper — many of its old-time readers say they have stopped buying it.

Following several changes, Abdel-Al El-Baqouri was appointed editor-in-chief a little over a year ago. Described as an "outsider" by a leading party member, who asked that his name be withheld, El-Baqouri had spent 12 years working in the Arab Gulf, during which time he was not involved in party politics.

For his part, El-Baqouri said that the elections will be the main focus of the newspaper until 29 November — election day. The idea of publishing the newspaper on a twice-weekly basis during this period is under discussion, but whether the necessary money could be raised was open to question, he said.

Al-Ahali's campaign will focus on supporting the party's candidates, criticising the ruling NDP, opposing the radical Islamist groups and their sympathisers and exposing corruption, El-Baqouri said.

"We are against any faction which supports terrorism, including those factions inside the ruling NDP," he asserted.

Hassan Ragab, a professor of journalism at the American University in Cairo, said *Al-Ahali* was in decline because Tagammu had turned into a "tame opposition".

"*Al-Ahali* has become a weak party newspaper that has no specific trend to advocate," he said. "Even its famous opinion page has now been cancelled, which shows that the party and the newspaper have very little to say against the government."

Ragab pointed to El-Baqouri's appointment as chief editor as evidence of the party leadership's attempt to tighten control over the paper: "In the past, there were journalists to lead *Al-Ahali*. Now, politicians are in control. This has led to the deterioration in the newspaper's quality.".

Abdallah may have elaborated the concept of Tagammu, as a broad coalition of the left, but it was El-Said who oversaw its implementation

The theorist

Ismail Sabri Abdallah, 70, is one of the founding fathers of Tagammu. After obtaining a PhD in economics from Paris University in 1951, he taught at Cairo and Alexandria universities and held several posts, including minister of economic planning, director of the Institute of National Planning, chairman of the Third World Forum, member of the UN Committee for Development Planning and chairman of the Arab Society for Economic Research. He was awarded the state merit award for social science in 1986 and serves on the advisory boards of several specialised publications.

During the period between the late 1940s, when he embraced Marxism, and 1965, when Egyptian communist organisations voluntarily dissolved, Abdallah was a leading member of the underground communist movement. He is noted as one of the major theorists of Marxism in Egypt.

A prolific author, Abdallah has written 20 books in English, including *Development Strategies in the Arab World* and *The World Order and Economic Independence through Socialism*. His eleven books in Arabic include, *Towards an Arab Economic Community* and *The Public Sector: Theory and Practice*. His 10 books in French include *La Voie Egyptienne Vers le Socialisme* and *Rôle du Secteur Public dans le Developement et la Planification*.

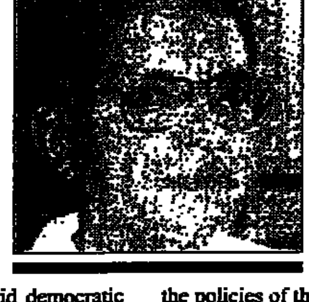
Between 1972 and the party's establishment in 1976, Abdallah was a leading member of a group which brooded over the idea of *tagammu* or a coalition that would bring together various leftist trends to share common political goals, despite their ideological differences. The idea had gained urgency following the death of Abdel-Nasser in 1970 and the subsequent retreat of his brand of socialism.

Abdallah played an active role in the party until two years ago when, along with other senior members, he decided to step down from his high-profile position in favour of the younger generation. However, although he has not been involved directly in preparations for the forthcoming elections, he has been regularly consulted on election issues at meetings of the party's Planning and Research Centre.

The organiser

Rifaat El-Said, 63, is secretary-general of Tagammu. A holder of two doctorate degrees in modern history, he is a part-time lecturer at the American University in Cairo and makes regular contributions to *Al-Ahali* and, occasionally, *Al-Ahram*.

He has written dozens of books, including *Pages from the History of the Muslim Brotherhood*, *History of the Socialist Movement in Egypt*, *Egyptian Socialist Organisations*, *History of the Communist Movement in Egypt* and *This Is How Communists Talk*. He has written one book in English: *The Communist Movement in Egypt 1920-1988* and another in French: *Contre L'Integrisme Islamiste*.



El-Said's scholarly interests have far from overshadowed his involvement in daily party activity, however. Deriving from the largest Egyptian communist organisation in the '40s and '50s, widely known as *Hadeto*, El-Said is said to have inherited the organisational skills of *Hadeto's* founder, Henri Curiel.

His critics accuse him of being dictatorial and manipulative, an accusation which he vehemently denies. "Tagammu is based on solid democratic foundations. No party member reaches a senior position unless he is elected to it," El-Said said.

His influence within Tagammu is comparable only to that of party leader Khaled Mohieddin, however. First as organisational secretary and more recently as secretary general, he has successfully maintained his power within the party — often against fierce attacks from opponents — since its founding to the present.

More than anyone, El-Said is accused of engineering the shift in party policy towards a rapprochement with the Mubarak regime. But few of his opponents would charge this was for want of personal courage. His scathing attacks against the Islamist movement have earned him a high place on the death-lists of Islamist militants.

El-Said has been noted also for his defence of the rights of Copts, devoting a considerable number of his articles in the party's mouthpiece, *Al-Ahali*, to attacks against instances of anti-Coptic discrimination. He takes pride in that "Tagammu is contesting the coming elections with a high degree of devotion to national unity" between Muslims and Copts.

But he vehemently denies the charge that, in the coming elections, Tagammu is making united cause with the government against the Islamists. "We believe that the policies of the ruling party are wrong and dangerous for the country, while Islamist groups are more wrong and more dangerous. And while some may argue that it would be better for us to fight just one antagonist, we are not ready to forsake our principles to win one or two seats in parliament."

Independent analysts, interviewed by the *Weekly*, praised Tagammu's scholarly and cultural resources, but had little to say about its mass appeal

Unorganically intellectual

The founders of Tagammu were mostly former Marxists and communists, some of the country's finest intellectuals. The party has remained loyal to the socialist agenda: the public sector; workers' rights; it is anti-fundamentalist, anti-Western, and anti-corruption.

The party's principal problem has been its failure to establish an organic link with the masses.

I expect that they will step up their campaign in the coming elections but they will not win many seats, probably 10 to 15, mainly through the family ties of some party leaders such as Khaled Mohieddin and Lutfi Waked, whose relatives command wide support in their constituencies.

I don't think that the Islamists will be a threat to Tagammu in the coming elections. They appeal to different constituencies: the Islamists to the lower and lower-middle classes and Tagammu to organised labour and the working class.

I don't think that the parties have equal chances in the elections because the NDP candidates have an administrative advantage, government support and tremendous resources. None of the other parties have the same advantages.

Saadeddin Ibrahim
Professor of sociology
at the American University in Cairo
and head of the Ibn Khaldoun Research Centre

Cultural impact

Although nearly two decades have passed since the establishment of Tagammu, it has failed to communicate successfully with the working class and with a considerable section of the intelligentsia.

Party leaders claim that this failure is due to restrictions imposed by the government on the activities of political parties. It can actually be attributed to two other important factors.

The first is that a significant number of Tagammu members are Nasserists, or are influenced by the Nasserist model, in the sense that they are still looking for a leader who would introduce progressive reforms without being a product of a people's movement.

The second reason is that after a long period of debating whether they should cooperate with the government or oppose it, the party came to the conclusion that they should support the existing regime rather than try to marshal support for themselves among the people.

I cannot be certain whether Tagammu will be able to improve on its electoral record in the last elections, when it was the only opposition party contesting them. This time, it is facing competition from the Wafd, Labour and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Although Tagammu gets a small percentage of the national vote, it is popular with certain sections of the intelligentsia and has an important cultural impact. It also takes positions, such as defence of workers' rights, which are popular with the working class.

Mustafa El-Sayed
Professor of political science at Cairo University

Developmental flaws

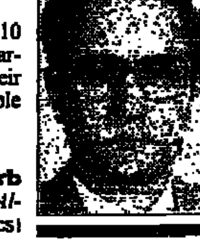
The Tagammu Party is a mixture of political trends: socialist, Marxist and Nasserist. And yet the party has always been keen on distinguishing itself from all these groups and projecting itself as Arab unionist.

The most important characteristic of Tagammu is that it recognises the system of government and uses legitimate methods to challenge it peacefully. It is part of the political order in the sense that it seeks greater democracy peacefully and as a political end. The party is a true champion of national unity between Muslims and Christians, independence, close relations with Arab countries and freedoms of belief and expression.

The party has been influential mainly in intellectual circles, and, to a lesser degree, among workers. It also has a presence among students, although this category is more influenced now by Islamism.

The party's main flaw is its definition of economic development from a Marxist perspective: the emphasis on the public ownership of the means of production, through the public sector. As a result, the party is torn between the ineffectiveness of these slogans and their importance as a means of attaining social justice and workers' rights.

Tagammu is expected to win between five and 10 seats in the coming elections. Their presence in parliament is positive because they are sincere in their goals, they defend workers' rights in an acceptable manner and challenge corruption.



Osama El-Ghazali Harb
Editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram's *Al-Siyassah Al-Dawliya* (International Politics)

While a government team negotiated earlier this month with the European Commission over a proposed partnership agreement that would eventually create a free trade area with Europe, the Federation of Egyptian Industries voiced strong objections to the proposed agreement in a report published last week. **Niveen Wahish** interviews the head of the Egyptian delegation and reviews the FEI report

More trade, not aid

Gamal Bayoumi, assistant minister for foreign affairs — Egyptian European Partnership Unit, headed the Egyptian delegation in the fourth round of negotiations over the partnership agreement, held 16-20 October in Brussels. He spoke with Al-Ahram Weekly *on the results of the talks and the gains realised by the Egyptian team.*

How did discussions go during the fourth round of negotiations with the European Commission?
We carried out the first joint reading of the 90 articles of the draft agreement. We went through the non-controversial points, and agreed with the commission that the agreement would not be considered final until we reach a consensus on all points. Then we held specialised work sessions to address each issue in dispute.

What conclusions did you reach?
During this round, we were trying to consolidate the Egyptian position. What we are being offered is an unbalanced relationship that allows for the liberalisation of industrial products, but places a number of restrictions on agricultural products and agro-industries. This is because the European side has so far not been able to liberalise its agricultural sector.

We, as a negotiating team are not seeking to change the European agricultural policy (CAP), but to make it possible for our agricultural exports to enter the European market free of customs duties.

The European offer places quotas on each of our agricultural exports and specifies seasons during which our goods are allowed tariff-free, unrestricted entry into EU markets.

We must take into account that our agricultural exports are increasing. We must take this increase into consideration and not limit ourselves by agreeing to quotas. Instead, we must look ahead and seek to export to Europe ECU1billion in *agricultural goods over the next few* years.

In principle, the Europeans have expressed their understanding to our demands. We still have to consider the seasons and quotas during which our products will be allowed duty-free entry.

In the meantime, our industrial exports will enjoy customs-free access to EU markets. According to the agreement, Europe will open its markets to our industrial products 12 years before we are expected to do the same.

We have also been successful in representing the rights of Egyptian workers in the EU market. I refer not to labourers but to professionals.

We also put forth our demands regarding different groups of Egyptian workers. There are around 300,000 to 400,000 workers legally living in Europe who hold work permits and residence. This group will not be affected by the agreement, but we demanded that when they want to return to Egypt, they be entitled to the same advantages as their European counterparts in terms of pensions and social insurance benefits.

The second group comprises those who have jobs but no residence permit. We are demanding that this group be granted residence permist as long as they have a job. As for those who have neither a job nor a residence permit, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry is in the process of creating a fund to help resettle these individuals. The EU has been invited to contribute to financing this fund.

We are also demanding an increase in Egypt's quota of visas to the EU countries, *to meet the expected surge in the* number of people travelling to EU countries, especially for business, after the agreement.

We also discussed cultural and scientific cooperation, and demanded an expansion in the scope of cooperation in these *fields* beyond what is outlined in the draft agreement.

We presented to the Europeans three proposals for projects supporting scientific research in Egypt which will enable it to contribute to the development of local industry during the transitional period. *Again, in principle, the Europeans* have agreed to all these points.

Has the European side agreed to lengthen the transition period?
The Egyptian team has demanded a 15-year transition period. However, to prove that we are serious we must first devise a programme for developing our industries. Suppose we discover we only need seven years.

The length of the transitional period is a double-edged sword. If we are able to develop our industry within the prescribed time, we add value to our products.

I stress that what we will achieve in 15 years will not be impossible in 12 years. Besides, if we sign the agreement in 1996, we have at least two years before the agreement is ratified by both sides. Therefore, we have about two and a half years before the agreement is implemented, in addition to the 12 years already specified by the agreement.

What are the issues still creating conflict?
There are four ghosts haunting the agreement: the rules of origin, the standards, intellectual property rights and the issue of competition.

The rules of origin are an annex to the agreement and we will have to deal with them whether or not we conclude an agreement. We must agree to the percentage of local components necessary for a product to be called "Egyptian" The problem arises when a product uses components from a third party. We must manufacture the product in a way that would allow it entry in the EU market. During the negotiations, we hope to add to the rules of origin those procedures we deem suitable to the Egyptian industrial process.

We have to abide by the EU rules of origin whether we sign the agreement or not. But if we do sign, we will be granted certain advantages. The same applies to standards. Although we will have to apply them irrespective of whether we are party to the agreement or not, yet, through the negotiations, we are seeking to win preferential treatment.

However, there are specifications which are not negotiable such as those affecting the safety or health of the consumer. These are obligatory and must be respected.

Intellectual property rights (IPR) will be beneficial to Egypt because many of our books, films and cultural productions are stolen and printed elsewhere without dues being paid. On the other hand, the Egyptian industry must respect the IPR of others.

You have seen the Federation of Egyptian Industries report. Have the concerns of industry been taken into consideration?
There are industries that will benefit and others which will lose by the agreement. Therefore, we must find a balance between the two. If a greater number of industries will benefit at the expense of others, we must go forward. In the meantime, we must study the extent of *the damage and try to find solutions.*

For example, the engineering industries will be affected unless they are improved. However, this harm will not be drastic if the industries benefit from the technical assistance that will be available through the agreement.

We will be taking the demands of everyone into account before reaching an overall decision. The negotiating team represents all sectors of the economy.

What is the difference between the proposed partnership and the 1977 cooperation agreement?
The 1977 agreement was a one-way agreement, a donor-recipient relationship. The partnership will be an agreement between partners taking into account that one side is less developed than the other and thus is granted some concessions and will receive assistance. The new relationship within the partnership is one of trade, not aid.

Under the 1977 agreement, agricultural exports to the EU were tied down by quotas and export seasons that did not coincide with Egypt's production cycle. Now we will modify these to fall within the right seasons. In addition, the textiles industry, which had previously suffered due to quotas, will benefit.

Will grant aid be separate or part of the agreement?
The agreement is an umbrella agreement. It provides for future financial cooperation, but does not specify a figure.

Previously, financial assistance was in the form of a budget which created a *pipeline. Once you used an amount you* could keep the rest of what was provided. Under its new Mediterranean policy, the EU will offer $4.7 billion worth of grants and a similar amount in credits to all Mediterranean countries for the next three years. Egypt has to present the projects it seeks to finance. It is now up to us to prepare a pipeline of projects and not a pipeline of finance.

Assistance within the partnership is better. The figure we expect to receive is four times what we received in 1992 and ten times the average of what have been given since 1977.

If we do not sign the agreement, we will still receive assistance simply because Egypt is a developing country. That assistance, however, will not fall under the banner of cooperation and trade between the EU and the Mediterranean countries. This is not the aim of our negotiations. We want Egypt to become a base for economic and industrial development, as well as scientific research.

When is the next round of negotiations?
In the coming stage we will not be negotiating the agreement as a whole, but we will have sectorial negotiations.

Do you think you will be able to conclude the negotiations before the mid-1996 deadline ?
1996 is a target not a deadline. Our only deadline is constructing a strong negotiating position for Egypt. We are going to take all the time we need to cover our *demands. We hope to uphold* the interests of Egypt regardless of the time it takes.

The report of our discontent

A detailed report prepared by the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI), which evaluates the proposed partnership agreement and suggests a number of amendments, will be instrumental in aiding Egyptian negotiators in the Egypt-EU partnership negotiations.

The report begins by demanding that the preferential partnership agreement should grant Egypt more concessions in EU markets than were granted under the multilateral free trade agreement known as GATT, and should represent a clear addition to the 1977 cooperation agreement with the European Community.

Echoing Egyptian demands voiced throughout the negotiations, the report urges that the transitional period before a full-fledged free trade area comes into existence be 15 years instead of 12, to allow the Egyptian economy time to adjust.

In addition, the FEI insists that the rules of origin outlined by the agreement should safeguard the comparative advantage currently enjoyed by Egyptian goods which utilise imported inputs. The agreement should also ensure that European quality specifications are not used to deny entry of Egyptian goods into the European market. In fact, the FEI asserts that for Egypt to benefit from the agreement, the EU must directly contribute to the development of Egyptian quality assurance systems and upgrade Egyptian industries to this end within the first few years of the transitional period.

The report adds that the agreement must also ensure the rights of Egyptian workers within the EU regarding wages, pension and compensations.

It also stressed Egypt's right to nullify any of the articles of the agreement if it is proven that dumping or subsidising is taking place. However, it argues that negotiators should reject Europe's claim that the 10-year tax exemption for industries built in the new industrial cities and the additional two years granted to producers using 60 per cent local components, constitute subsidisation.

The FEI report stated that negotiators should reject the European concept that limits government subsidy to areas with high unemployment rates and low wages. They should also refuse the article which states that the EU be informed of any subsidy to the industrial sector during the first five years of the agreement.

Addressing the issue of rules of origin, a major point of conflict between the two sides, the FEI argued that the rules of origin proposed by the EU restrict Egyptian industries, and in some cases, require producers to change the sources of their imports and their inputs in order to enter EU markets free of duties. To support the negotiating team, the FEI is preparing a detailed study of Egyptian goods which require imported inputs. The study will list the percentages of foreign components of each product exported to the EU to determe how the EU-proposed rules of origin, annexed to the agreement, would affect the various industries.

The FEI recommended that the specifications of both parties be acknowledged. Meanwhile, the EU should specify a budget for modernising and promoting Egypt's quality system and endeavour to make Egyptian quality specifications acceptable in the EU.

Tackling the issue of intellectual property rights, the FEI believes that these should be implemented according to GATT regulations. The proposed partnership agreement demands that the protection of intellectual property rights be completed within three years. The FEI regards this period as too short.

Some of the FEI's chambers have prepared studies detailing the effects of the proposed partnership agreement on individual sectors. The concerns of the chambers gave life to the demands of the federation, with most of the sector representatives arguing that the government should move to alleviate the financial burdens shouldered by producers to enable them to compete with EU products in a free trade zone.

For its part, the Chamber of Food Industries noted that the rules of origin will be problematic for food companies using raw materials that are imported. Clear criteria for the application of rules of origin should be stated to prevent Europe from imposing unnecessary restrictions on Egyptian exports.

The chamber's report argued that the partnership agreement should not negate the comparative advantage currently enjoyed by Egyptian agricultural and food products using cheap imported raw materials.

It also voiced its concern that some products may not gain entry to EU markets because they were produced in labour conditions that are not up to European standards. It points out that Egypt, like all developing countries, has the advantage of having an abundant supply of cheap labour. Any attempt to match conditions in European factories would increase the cost of production.

The Chamber of Printing, Binding and Paper Production complained that the partnership would give high-quality, low-priced EU paper products duty-free access to the Egyptian market at a time when Egyptian producers are overburdened with duties on raw materials and production requirements, energy prices and taxes.

The high costs of production ano packaging would put Egyptian products at a disadvantage in terms of price, and diminish export opportunities which the agreement provides for Egyptian paper products in EU markets.

The Chamber of Cereals voiced its concern that free trade with the EU could negatively impact on this important sector and on many other affiliated industries. The chamber rejected article 9 of the draft agreement which exempts both parties' agricultural products from customs duties.

The chamber's report states that Egyptian flour mills, in particular, will be affected by competition with EU imports, especially those producing fine, very pure flour. Egypt's monthly consumption of this brand of flour does not exceed 75,000 tonnes whereas local mills produce over 97,000 tonnes in addition to substantial imports from the US and France, which subsidise their production.

"If all this cereal is allowed into the Egyptian market without any restrictions, Egyptian mills will stop and we will lose almost 400,000 tonnes of bran. The price of meat will also be affected as the bran is used as animal fodder," the report argued.

The Chamber of Engineering Industries, whose members argued that allowing European goods free entry to the Egyptian market would hit hard at their industries, noted that the two sides take precautions so that the trade balance does not shift further in Europe's favour. The chamber's report recommended that the agreement set a ceiling on the amount of European goods entering the Egyptian market. Egypt must also reserve the right to review the agreement should the EU surpass this limit.

They also warned that environmental restrictions on all products entering the European markets should be clearly stated in the agreement to protect exports being denied entry into the EU on the pretext that they were manufactured using technology harmful to the environment.

The demands of the Chamber of Leather Tanning Industries were more specific. The chamber called upon the government to adopt export-oriented policies to place Egyptian and European products on equal footing. It demanded a reduction of tariffs and taxes on industries producing for export, as well as the protection of the local market against illegal competition, and adequate training for technical labourers.

The chamber demanded that shoes and leather products imported from the EU not be exempted from customs during the transition period. It also recommended that imported raw materials, production requirements, equipment and spare parts needed by the leather tanning industry be exempt from customs duties.

Tell-tale figures

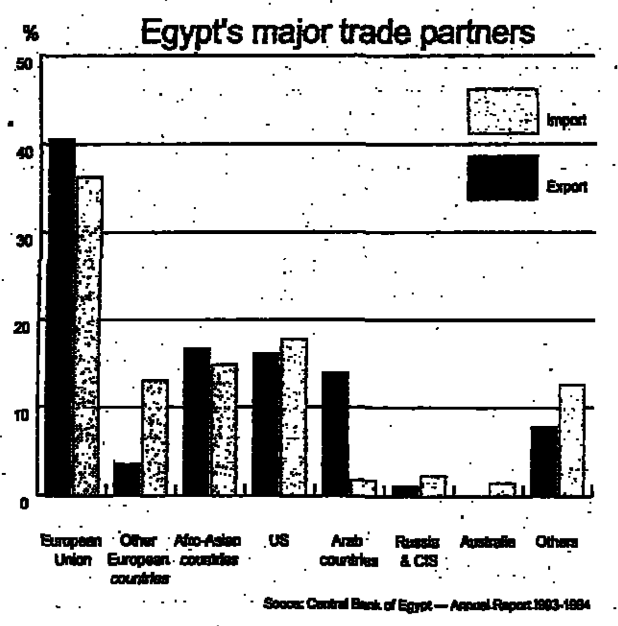
TO AGREE or not to agree may be the question, but statistics could hold the answer. Figures on Egypt-European Union (EU) trade reveal that the EU has traditionally been Egypt's main trading partner. In fiscal 1993/94, almost 36 per cent of Egypt's imports came from the EU while just over 40 per cent of its exports went to EU member states.

While the percentages appear to be in Egypt's favour, the monetary values indicate otherwise. *In fiscal 1993/94,* Egypt exported $1244.3 million in goods to the EU, but imported $3895.2 million. This amounts to a trade deficit of $2650.9 million.

A more in-depth look at the kinds of exports puts the picture into sharper, albeit, more alarming, perspective. Figures indicate that Egypt's exports of oil products represented about 66 per cent of the country's total exports to the EU in 1993. In the first half of 1994, oil exports have reached 56 per cent of total exports. The conclusion to be drawn is that Egypt's commodity exports are anything but diverse.

To help bridge the trade gap and balance the deficit, a partnership agreement between Egypt and the EU is necessary. This agreement would help increase the competitiveness of Egypt's non-oil exports and would allow them free access to European markets.

Mahmoud El-Kassas



Source: Central Bank of Egypt — Annual Report 1993-1994

EU loan for a buck

THE EUROPEAN Commission has granted Egypt a ECU75 million loan (LE312 million) for the agricultural sector.

The loan, part of a five-year credit scheme, is earmarked for food production projects, especially in rural areas. Aimed at creating job opportunities for rural residents, the loan targets small and medium-scale farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs.

The production projects to be implemented will encompass *the livestock, poultry, fishery and irrigation sectors, and will* include training programmes and technical assistance, in addition to helping producers adapt to the new, free market environment. The training programmes will touch on farm management, administration and finance.

This programme is another step in the EU's Food Sector Development Programme.

Tapping into the resources

MODERNISATION, computerisation, and streamlining administration were the catch words buzzing around during a conference entitled "Strategies for Human Investments," sponsored by the ministries of manpower and industry in Cairo last week, reports **Mahmoud Bakr.**

More than 300 Arab and international management experts, business professors converged on the conference to discuss means of improving the use of human resources in the Arab world.

Participants stressed the importance of introducing administrative education within the school system and establishing specialised units to train and develop a new generation of young managers.

Others, however, argued that emphasis should be laid on supporting creative abilities and employing these abilities in a way which best serves the needs of various Arab institutions.

The consensus during the conference focused on the need to apply information technology and upgrade the administrative system as the main prerequisites for enhancing the performance of any organisation.

Ford's back in town

TRAFFIC congestion notwithstanding, the boom in car sales in Egypt is continuing. With sales increasing from 20,000 in 1992 to a projected 75,000 this year, Ford Motor Co. announced last week its intention to return to the Egyptian market.

At a press conference last week, Michael Auld, general manager for Ford's Worldwide Export Operations, said his company is enthusiastic about the prospects for Ford sales in Egypt. The company will sell its cars through its dealer in Egypt, Ragab Industry and Trade Group.

The recent surge in car sales results from the lifting of a 1985 law which banned the import of cars. The import ban was removed in 1992.

With the increase in sales, other international vehicle manufacturers are expected to follow Ford. Further increases in car sales are expected with the gradual reduction in customs tariffs as stipulated by the World Trade Organisation.

Market report

Floating shares, sliding market

FOR THE third consecutive week, the General Market Index slid, losing 0.53 points to level off at 211.81 points for the week ending 26 October. Market analysts attributed the decline to an announcement about the floating of 500,000 shares of the Helwan Portland Cement Co. which prompted investors to liquidate their portfolios to buy the newly floated shares.

In addition, the value of market activity more than doubled over the week as LE50.56 million in shares were traded compared to LE23.05 million the previous week.

The manufacturing sector's index lost 0.95 points to close at 296.69 points. Shares of the Nile Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Co. absorbed the greatest loss in value, plummeting by 18.52 per cent of their value to level off at LE48.38 per share. The shares of other companies also took a beating on the market. Shares of the Paint and Chemical Industries Co. and the Alexandria *Spinning and Weaving Co. lost LE7 and LE2.5 per share to close at LE645 and LE20 respectively.*

Gains in the share value of other companies, however, partially compensated for the drop. Shares of Ameriya Rhone Polenc Pharmaceuticals gained LE10 per share to close at LE320 while shares of the Suez Cement Co. jumped from LE41.60 the week before to LE43.99 this week.

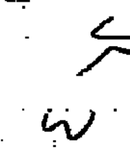
If bad news comes in twos, then the manufacturing sector was teamed up with the financial sector. The financial sector's index slipped by 0.46 points to close at 180.49 points. Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) lost LE2.49 per share to close at LE517.5 per share, while those of El-Mohandes Bank gained LE0.15 per share to close at LE14.15 per share. Misr International Bank's (MIBank) shares remained unchanged at LE270 per share, with only 241 shares changing hands over the course of the week.

The week's top performers in the various sectors include the Egypt International Tourism Projects Co., which recorded a 64.34 per cent increase in its share value to close at LE5.51. The Cairo Light Industries Co., which topped the market in terms of the value of transactions, traded LE7.2 million in shares, capturing 18.35 per cent of the total market activity. The value of its shares, however, remained unchanged at LE366 per share. Last, but not least, the Gulf for Arab Investments Co. traded 137,500 shares or 22.99 per cent of the total number of shares traded, to close at LE1.44 per share.

Overall, the shares of 22 companies increased in value, those of 21 decreased and 31 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

105

In the recent past, the *omda*, or village mayor, conjured up the mental picture of an awesome man, probably in flowing robes, sporting a large moustache, bellowing orders at his underlings. Today, some *omdas* wear business suits and are quite sophisticated. In the latest instalment of his series on contemporary Egyptian life as seen through the eyes of *Al-Ahram*, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** traces the history of the *omda* since the institution's beginnings some 150 years ago


Illustration: Makram Henein

"The village mayor is the government's representative for enforcing the rule of law and order in the countryside. He is directly responsible for the welfare of the village, the probity of its inhabitants in their conduct towards one another and the augmentation of their prosperity through the exercise of justice and equality among them. Conversely, negligence in these duties gives rise to the degeneration of the probity of the village, with corruption permeating the conduct of activities and failure, destruction and conflict spreading."

The above excerpt from an Egyptian Ministry of Interior edict published in September 1884 summarises the government's perspective on the post of the village mayor and his relationship to the central authorities. The history of this personage and the evolution of his relationship to Cairo have been of recurrent interest to *Al-Ahram* over the last two decades of the 19th century.

The *omda*, or village mayor, is a relatively modern development in Egyptian history. Records show that the title was only used as an epithet for a village sheikh toward the end of the reign of Mohamed Ali and then it had only limited currency. Under the feudal system that had prevailed during the Ottoman era, the village sheikh was the local representative of the Turkish officer who had the concession to tax-farming in a particular fief and who rarely resided in the village. When Mohamed Ali put an end to the feudal system, the village sheikh's service was transferred from the Ottoman tax-farmer to the Pasha. It was under these circumstances that the *omda* made his debut.

This development is recorded by *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Mit Yazid on 18 May 1894. He wrote, "After Mohamed Ali Pasha consolidated his power and devoted his attention to reform, he selected prominent men from the old houses and appointed some as provincial directors, others as precinct sheikhs and others as district sheikhs and he appointed an *omda* for every village to be assisted by several other sheikhs." Nevertheless, the author's depiction of the change in administrative bureaucracy during Mohamed Ali's reign seems cut off from the important economic and social changes of that era.

The transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy that Mohamed Ali instituted, and notably the switch to the cultivation of cash crops, were bound to lead to a transfiguration of the countryside that would affect the village sheikh.

Firstly, the village could no longer remain a self-sufficient productive entity. To acclimatise to the new reality, it has to intermesh in the new gridwork of relations with neighbouring villages, local and central authorities and finally the merchants who began to appear in the villages to buy the new cash crops. Such was the expanding scope of activity that the number of village sheikhs increased. In fact, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Mit Yazid noted that the Pasha of Egypt had acknowledged up to 24 village sheikhs in a single village. These sheikhs were headed by a senior sheikh, who in some documents is referred to as the "sheikh of sheikhs" and in others as "al-sheikh al-kabir". Only in occasional instances did the senior sheikh give himself the title of *omda*.

Ultimately this title gained popular and official usage, but the tradition only solidified during the consecutive reigns of Mohamed Ali's successors, Said and Ismail. This was a period that saw the expansion of capitalist agriculture, based primarily on the production of cotton. It was also during this time that the transition was made to private land ownership, which in turn brought about important changes in the social structure. For the first time, village sheikhs were able to purchase tracts of land and to join the new and growing class of middle and large landowners. Their new status gave rise to that ironic correlation between position and wealth. While the village sheikhs, and primarily the *omda*, exploited their position to extend their land holdings, their increased property ownership vested their position with greater standing and authority. It was virtually acknowledged that the biggest landowner would be the *omda*. If the village had several large landowners, the rivalry over the appointment could be intense.

Two important trends evolved from these new conditions. Firstly, village dynasties emerged that would pass the *omda*-ship from generation to generation as long as they managed to hold the largest land monopoly. Secondly, if a new *omda* had to be appointed in the event of a previous *omda*'s death, the village's most influential personalities — meaning the largest landowners — would put forward their candidate. So generally their choice was the son of the previous *omda* and their selection only had to be rubber-stamped by the provincial authorities, who only required that he must be "of praiseworthy character." Moreover, it appears that authorities could hardly object if the deceased *omda*'s son they selected was still underage. They may have stipulated the appointment of a proxy until the son came of age, but the position would remain in the village's most prominent family.

Several reports from *Al-Ahram* correspondents testify to this phenomenon. Its correspondent in Quwaysna writes that the *omda* of Malig was selected "after a special commission consisting of the prominent men of the provincial directorate decided to appoint the eldest son of the deceased *omda*." The front page of *Al-Ahram*'s 26 June 1894 edition goes so far as to say *omdas* are selected "by trustworthy citizens" and that the standards for selection are based "on the wealth of the candidates."

Once the new *omda* was selected, he would be officially sworn into office. The official document which delineated the obligations incumbent upon the *omda* read as follows in one instance: "Whereby you have been selected by the citizens and deemed suitable and willing to supervise their affairs, and whereby they have testified to your integrity and rectitude, this decree, with the accompanying ratification, seal, notification and promulgation, has been issued to confirm your appointment; and it is hereby incumbent upon you to assume the rights and duties incumbent upon this office and, to the best of your ability, to strive to improve the welfare of the citizens, to advance the causes of their affluence and the quality of their crops, to comply with all orders and notifications issued to you and to treat the people with justice and clemency, so as not to prejudice a single individual for ulterior motive or gain."

Nevertheless, from the end of the reign of Mohamed Ali (1848) to the promulgation of the first law pertaining to the village mayor (1895), a series of developments transformed the position of the *omda* to such a degree that direct government intervention by legislation became necessary. The law was to arouse sharp controversy, and *Al-Ahram* dedicated extensive space on its pages to declaring its stance.

The most important transformation evolved from the building of the modern state. The process added new and unforeseen burdens to the office of the *omda*. Many of these involved village security which was under the purvey of the *omda*. Paying the salaries of the village sentinels was one of these. Throughout the above-mentioned period, the *omda* had to arrange for the necessary expenditures to support a corps of village sentinels, with no recourse to government assistance. "The *omda* must arrange to pay the salaries of the sentinels on his own cognizance without the assistance of any other party," writes *Al-Ahram*'s agent in Girga. During the harvest season, it was also the *omda*'s responsibility to "take the necessary precautions to prevent the inadvertent burning down of grain silos from the spread of the fires the *fellahin* set around bales of straw." They further had the responsibility to investigate newcomers and strangers, in addition to the customary obligations of preventing theft, murder and arson in the fields.

Although tax collecting per se was nothing new to the village chief, having been perhaps his primary function under the feudal system, the old excuses no longer washed with the authorities, who might go so far as to dismiss any *omda* found remiss in his duty to assist the government tax collector. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent at Senouris tells an amusing story in one of the newspaper's November 1890 editions. He relates that the villagers "pledged to collect the money required by the government for fear that their *omda* would be dismissed and that Sheikh Mahfouz Nasir, the former *omda*, would be brought back, for the latter was known for the brutal means he used to collect taxes."

Another major burden was to supply the village's quota of recruits for national conscription. Failure to do so could result in trial by military court and ultimately a sentence to hard labour and permanent dismissal. We read in this regard a report from *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Akhmim who wrote, "The public has expressed its dismay at the dismissal of the honourable former *omda* for no compelling reason other than the fact that he was accused of having concealed the name of an individual who was eligible for military conscription, an accusation of which he has been proven innocent."

The weight of the *omda*'s position was compounded by a lengthy list of other duties. He had to ensure that the proper precautions were taken in the event of epidemics. He had to supervise the strengthening of levees and dams during the flooding of the Nile. He had to participate in the census the government would conduct from time to time.

"The job's not worth all the trouble," complained one beleaguered *omda* to an *Al-Ahram* correspondent. His grievance explains a wave of *omdas* tendering their resignation that we can monitor in the newspaper. In March 1892 we read that the *omda* of Quwaysna "submitted a petition to the provincial director in which he said that he is alone, without assistance, and cannot perform his responsibilities. He, therefore, asks the authorities relieve him of his duties and to appoint another individual." In Autumn of the following year, from Al-Sinta, we learn that the district commissioner, unable to dissuade an *omda* from tendering his resignation, finally had to appoint his brother in his stead.

At this time, Cairo was in the process of formulating the supreme decree that would define the duties and privileges of the *omda*. News of the imminent decree began to appear in December 1894, when *Al-Ahram* announced that the government had declared its intention to promulgate a law that would establish a new system for appointing *omdas*, organise their chain of command in the government hierarchy and define their powers and areas of jurisdiction.

It was proposed that *omdas* would be appointed "by a committee composed of the provincial director or his proxy, a representative of the ministry of interior, a representative of the ministry of justice and four prominent *omdas* in the directorate all of whom would take into consideration the opinion of the district police commissioner." In other words, the government intended to gain the upper hand over the local landlords in these appointments.

As for the chain of command, the *omda* would be directly responsible to the district police commissioner. "The directorate has no authority to summon the *omda* except under extraordinary circumstances that require his presence. Otherwise, all communications shall be through writing," the proposal stated. Perhaps this explains the close relationship between the *omda* and the district police commissioner that we frequently note in the literature depicting rural Egypt.

Under the provisions of the new law, the scope of the *omda*'s jurisdiction would broaden. In addition to the administrative concerns of security, health, irrigation and conscription, the village mayor would assume a new juridical function. The *omda* would henceforth have the authority to give a final ruling in civil cases involving fines of 200 piastres or fines of up to 15 piastres in ncivil cases, or prison up to 24 hours for contraventions. Here we can understand why a representative from the Ministry of Justice was to be included on the selection committee.

The new law would preserve some of the privileges the *omda* had enjoyed up to that time. These included the exemption of two of his sons from military service, the exemption of five feddans of land from government taxes and the right to free railway transportation. To these the new law added another privilege that would grant the *omda* a form of legislative immunity. The *omda* "cannot be brought to trial in a criminal court in the course of the performance of his duties, nor can he be brought to trial without first seeking the approval of the Ministry of JIustice which, in turn, must seek the approval of the Ministry of Interior, which may or may not consent to a trial." So reads the controversial proposal for Egypt's first law pertaining to the village *omda*.

At first glance, it seems to extend the *omda*'s jurisdiction and to increase the privileges to which he is entitled; privileges which were intended to attract "the sons of prominent families" rather than "the poor and destitute" who would exploit the position toward personal gain. *Al-Ahram*, however, had a different view.

In the opinion of the newspaper, this was a project of British manufacture conceived to achieve the aims of the occupation. Should it be applied, it would represent "paramount catastrophe to befall the *fellahin* these days, as though the damage the government has already caused them was not enough. It wants to hand them over to *omdas* who will really give them the bitter taste of tyranny."

Al-Ahram was correct in its suspicions. Among the people to conceive the law were Mr. Scott, Mr. Kitchner when he was the chief of police, and Mr Steel, all of whom were representatives of the occupation authority and who had British colonial interests at heart. Also, the British High Commissioner in Cairo at that time, Lord Cromer was known to have said that the true guarantee for the stability of the British occupation of Egypt lies in the countryside, not in the city. He had many motives for wanting to preserve rural law and order. One was to forward the interests of British commercial houses in need of Egyptian cotton. Thus, as long as the villages were kept tranquil through the offices of the *omda*, the rest of Egypt would remain calm. The British rarely concerned themselves with the activities of their opponents in the cities, whom they termed "the temperamental *effendis* whose anger is quick to abate."

Therefore, when *Al-Ahram* proposed that the Ministry of Interior "create a committee composed of learned and experienced men in administration and jurisprudence, men who have acquired wisdom from the laws and systems that have come and gone in the past and are thus better equipped to discern the good from the bad," in order to formulate a new proposal. *Al-Ahram*'s appeal found no sympathetic ears. Clearly it contradicted the policies of the occupation authorities.

Next, *Al-Ahram* opened its pages to other critics of the new law. Jalabi Salem from Kafr Salem made an important contribution that appeared in the newspaper's 20 February 1895 edition. Objecting to the proposed selection by committee versus the customary selection by prominent landowners, he argues, "There are many prominent men in the village who deem themselves above such positions, but if an *omda* of lesser stature is appointed over them, this will spark a conflagration of rivalries among them." Jalabi also believed that an *omda* appointed by commission would be more prone to tyrannise the inhabitants of the village, because they would have no say in his appointment, or whether he remains or is removed from power. "If such an *omda* had relatives of any degree who quarrelled with some adversary, would he pass judgement in accordance with the edicts of justice. No! And again no! For he would only seek to quench his thirst for revenge."

Al-Ahram was not the only newspaper to oppose the proposed law. Other Arabic and French newspapers, such as *Al-Mu'ayyad*, *Le Phare* and *Le Journal Egyptien*, also took up the campaign. *Al-Ahram* quoted from them frequently in the hope that when the bill would be submitted to the Consultative Legislative Council for revision, it would make some appropriate modifications or amendments.

When "The Supreme Decree pertaining to the *Omda* and Village Sheikhs" was finally passed, its eleven articles were published in *Al-Ahram* of 19 March 1895. It included none of the desired modifications, although article 8 added that "the current *omdas* and sheikhs will continue to hold those positions until it is decided to appoint new *omdas* and sheikhs in accordance with this decree." To the people concerned, this augured a major overturn in village authority at the hands of speedily created committees that "descended upon the villages to inspect the circumstances of each *omda* individually."

Al-Ahram followed the activities of these committees in Al-Menufiya and Al-Sharqiya provinces. In most cases, it said, "The English only appoint those who have proven their loyal obedience. It is as though they want to take over the land by killing any life in it." The newspaper also noted that the representative from the Ministry of Interior appointed to the committee was generally British. In Menufiya, where a Mr. Wilson was the Interior's committee representative, 16 new *omdas* were appointed in one go, we learn from one news item. A later issue comments that appointments in many districts "were against the wishes of the citizens, who were greatly perturbed and annoyed." It further noted the number of complaints it received regarding "the inequity in the selection of the *omdas* and the substitution of personal motives for the public interest."

Al-Ahram continued to monitor the results of the supreme decree and the disruption it caused in the countryside. In Al-Beheira in particular, it observed various forms of corruption that certain village mayors engaged in. Although it could not deny that "many are blessed with laudable characters and honourable morals," the newspaper continued its campaign, particularly when it learned that the authorities were compelling the *omdas* — even those who were illiterate — to subscribe only to *Al-Muqattam* newspaper, which was the mouthpiece for the occupation. Despite *Al-Ahram*'s claim, the Supreme Decree of 1895 remained the cornerstone of the village administrative system for years to come.


The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

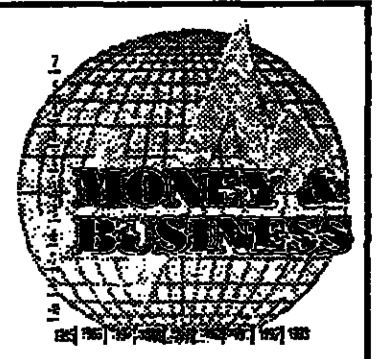
New mutual funds established

THE CAIRO Monetary Group has made preparations to issue mutual funds and financial portfolios in cooperation with a group of foreign and Egyptian companies within the framework of energising the market and will participate with the Egyptian Bank for Export Development and Egypt-Iran Bank.

Khalil Nagim, associate member of the association said that research work had been carried out on companies and different sectors to find the best opportunities for medium and long-term investment in Egypt and abroad to improve chances for growth and lessen the degrees of danger.

Presiding over the board of directors of the funds are Abdel-Ghani Gami', former chairman of the Bank of Alexandria. Heading the portfolio will be Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, former minister of industry.





Exports to South Africa

EGYPT'S commercial balance with South Africa has realised a surplus reaching LE172.4mn in the first half of the current year. Ihab Zaydan, trade commissioner for the Egyptian Embassy in South Africa, said that Egyptian exports in the first half of 1995 have reached LE214mn, a considerable increase over the LE6.4mn that was obtained during the same period of the previous year. He added that the value of Egyptian imports from South Africa in the first six months of this year reached LE42mn, as opposed to LE31mn in the same period of the previous year. He said that the increase in Egyptian exports to South Africa is due to the increase in mineral, petroleum and petrochemical exports, whose value increased in the first half of this year to LE204mn.

Religious tourism exhibition boosts Egyptian-Saudi ties

HUSSEIN Badran, first undersecretary at the Ministry of Tourism, and Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourism Association, opened the Third Saudi-Egyptian Religious Tourism Exhibition this past week, under the auspecies of Mamdouh El-Beltagui, minister of tourism. The exhibition, which ended 31 October, had its opening witnessed by a number of tourism experts and officials from Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Attending the exhibition are a large number of those involved in the touristic and hotel fields, as well as the public. On display at the exhibition are facilities and services of the hotel and tourism sector which Saudi Arabia offers to all those travelling on *Hajj* and *Umra*.. The exhibition is primarily aimed at the Egyptian market, which has great potential for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ahmed El-Ghamrawi, former consul general of Saudi Arabia, said that in this exhibition, organised by Arab International for Exhibitions, it is the private sector which has made great strides in this vital field. He pointed out that many representatives from Saudi companies and hotels are on hand assessing the Egyptian market which has more than 400 thousand people travel on *Umra* and over 100 thousand people travel on *Hajj* annually.

Likewise, Omar Bahaeddine Khashaqgi, representative of the Bahaeddine hotel chain, expressed his wish to meet as many visitors as possible at the exhibition, and inform them of the chain's facilities and its success in providing *Umra* and *Hajj* services. The company is working hard to reach its goals, as it is the first time it is participating in the exhibition. Bahaeddine spoke of the greater benefits that such exhibitions produce, saying that preparing and participating in them will result in a new understanding between the two countries that will bring forth positive and fruitful results.

Hossam Suliim, assistant general director of Mecca Commercial Housing Co., said: "We want to attract a larger portion of the Egyptian market and inform Egyptians about Mecca Commercial Housing, its competitive prices and services. He added that the importance of this exhibition is to provide accurate and correct information to those going on *Hajj* and *Umra*.

Osama Ahmed Al-Fasi, vice-chairman of the board of the Saudi Investment Association (Fasco), said that this exhibition showcased the best new services available to all Muslims, with the Egyptian market in particular, and the ease by which the investment association can make these services available to those desiring to visit the holy places. Al-Fasi mentioned the importance of the role of the private sector in strengthening mutual relations between the two countries in all aspects of tourism.

Bessam Al-Duwalibi, public relations manager, at the Jeddah Intercontinental, said that participating in this exhibition allowed him to inform tourist associations and the public about the excellent services and facilities which Intercontinental Hotels offers 24 hours a day at its hotels in Mecca and Jeddah.

Akram Hisham, president of the Qattan Association, says that "Our participation in this exhibition for the first time is one of the new steps Qattan Association is taking to develop *Hajj* and *Umra* activities, whereby we hope that this participation will result in a new market for promoting *Hajj* and *Umra* in Egypt.

Egyptian-Jordanian trade relations

BUSINESSMEN from Egypt and Jordan held an expanded meeting yesterday which included over 80 leading businessmen from the two countries. Attending the meeting were Ibrahim Fawzi, minister of industry, and Mohamed Farid Khamisa, president of the Egyptian Industries' Federation. Discussion in the meeting centred around means of boosting trade cooperation between the two countries, and future plans to increase commercial exchange.

In related news, a delegation of Jordanian businessmen will visit Cairo on 8 November to discuss means of joint cooperation between businessmen from Egypt and Jordan in the fields of trade and investment. Joint projects will include a number of industrial and agricultural projects to be established in both countries using private capital. The visit will take place within the framework of periodic meeting with the Egyptian-Jordanian Business Council. Businessmen from both countries during yesterday's meeting agreed to prepare reports outlining the barriers which restrict trade between Egypt and Jordan, and the problems resulting from the previous system, which was limited only to annual business protocols.

Businessmen from both countries discussed the problems faced by marine transport of commodities. The Egyptian side explained that customs levied on commodities going to the Arab Gulf states are expensive. In Jordan, for example, a single container of Egyptian goods can have duties reaching up to a thousand dollars.

Business news

Arafat demands infrastructure fund

PALESTINIAN President Yassar Arafat called for establishing a special fund for improving the worn-out Palestinian infrastructure almost destroyed by Israeli occupation. He noted that sealing Gaza for more than 3 months increased the unemployment rate up to 58 per cent and triggered daily losses of US$6 million.

Large cuts in US spending

THE US House of Representatives approved a bill to reduce government spending and to restructure social care programmes within 7 years. It was reported that the legislation would reduce taxes. In the voting, which took place in the majority Republican House of Representatives, 227 yes votes were given.

Saudi Arabia opposes an ME bank

OSAMA BIN Gaafar, Saudi minister of trade, stated that Saudi Arabia is against founding a regional bank for development in the Middle East. Addressing the Amman Summit, he confirmed that establishing peace has become inevitable and he hopes that the international community would exercise pressures on Israel to end the stalemate.

Hospitals will not be closed

ALI ABDEL Fattah, health minister, stated that non-functioning equipment in public hospitals will be overhauled. "Repairing medical equipment means saving many patients' lives. Therefore, the ministry is currently establishing maintenance centres", he added.

He also stated that all spare parts required for public hospitals will be imported in short time so that no hospital would be closed.

The minister stressed the importance of the affluent's contributions to support free medical treatment for lower-income brackets.

New ventures

THE COMPANIES' Establishment Committee of the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, headed by Ahmed Fouad Atta approved the establishment of 33 companies, among 18 of which are shareholding companies having capitals of LE236mn and initial capitals reaching LE41mn; 15 limited-responsibility companies with capitals reaching LE2,600mn. Among these companies, 18 are centred in Cairo; 8 in Giza; 3 in Alexandria and 1 company each in Sinai, 6 October, Monsoura and Shebbin Al-Koum.

Among these companies, 11 operate in the area of contracting, 8 are in tourism, 5 are in trade, and 4 in industry, 4 in service and one employment company.

Third option for Algeria

Algeria does not need an Islamic party to preserve its values, argues presidential candidate Said Sa'di in an interview in Algiers with Hisham Fahim

In his first interview with the Egyptian press, Said Sa'di, founder of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) talks about his bid for the Algerian presidency. A leading activist for Berber rights, Sa'di rose to political prominence in the seventies. His political activity cost him five years in prison. When the multi-party system was introduced in 1989, Sa'di formed the RCD and later headed the democratic front organisation, Movement for the Republic. Yet, Sa'di was among one of the few opposition leaders who called for the electoral process to be aborted in 1992 when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) achieved a landslide victory.

How do you see the nature of Algeria's crisis? Do you think that as a presidential candidate you will be able to help in solving your country's problems?

The country's current problems are a direct result of the regime's failures since 1962, when Algeria was liberated from French colonialism. Since then, the same old generation which liberated the country has remained in power while the social order has drastically changed.

This regime has failed over the past 30 years to establish a social or economic programme with a clear, strategic outlook for the future. The country's politics have been revolving in circles around charismatic leaders, rather than as part of a clear political and economic agenda.

Almost 75 per cent of the Algerians under 30 have been preoccupied with their individual survival, leaving the regime to stagnate. But I think that the time has come to search for a democratic alternative and to make a break in the political arena.

The continuing social changes in the country echo the dilemma of the political elite. That is why I am working on a socio-economic programme. As a member of the opposition for the past two decades, I believe it is high time for people in Algeria to choose between the candidates' programmes rather than between prominent figures, which is precisely what these elections offer to the Algerians.

Some people believe that Algerians chose their social agenda as far back as the November 1954 revolution. Do you agree and how does this differ from your programme?

This is not true. The November revolution was mainly to liberate Algeria. As for my programme, it is actually based on the 1956 manifesto which outlined the need to establish a social democratic state, rather than a religious/theocratic regime.

I should stress the fact that I'm not against religion, I was born and bred into a religious family. But I am against politicising Islam.

Moreover, I don't believe that we should have an Islamic party. Algerians have been good Muslims *for the past* 14 decades and if we want to preserve Islamic values, we can always establish an Islamic committee or organisation to supervise Islam's welfare in our country.

So, I'm not against Islam as a religion, but certainly against fundamentalism which is to me, a synonym for terrorism and violence. This violence was growing among young people even before the emergence of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). In January 1990, the authorities discovered weapons in 22 mosques.

You addressed Algerians on national TV in three different languages: Arabic, French and Berber. What is the significance of this and how does it relate to your programme?

According to our history and day-to-day reality, the *three* languages clearly exist in our communities. Let me stress the fact that the historical development of the eastern part of the Arab world differs from the Western side.

As to the French language, I think we should not see it as part of the colonial era, but rather a bounty of our fighting for independence. Most prominent figures in the national liberation movement before independence used to speak and write in the French language. Besides, it is a great privilege to have access to foreign languages, if only as a means of coping with technological progress.

What are the reasons behind the delay in your nomination for the presidential elections?

I decided to run for the presidency three weeks after the process started. There was an urgent need on my part to seek the maximum guarantees from the authorities. I wanted to know the actual state of security in the country, to make sure of the absolute neutral stand of the administration and to stress the need for an independent, watch-dog committee to supervise the elections. I should say that my requests were seriously considered.

Now, I'm quite sure that the Armed Islamic Group (AIG) is not as dangerous as it used to be in early 1993 and 1994. The group's activities has been limited to the centre of the country. An independent national committee to observe the elections has been formed and is headed by Abdel-Salam Habashi, one of the 22 distinguished Algerian revolutionary figures who have remained out of the ruling circle. There will be international organisations and the press present to ensure fair play during the elections.

I have also worked, with other candidates, to ensure fair and democratic procedures during the elections and that commitment was put into concrete form in what is known as the Democratic Document signed by all candidates.

Was Reda Malek's decision to run for the presidency another reason for your delayed candidacy, since both of you share the same views?

Of course. Reda Malek represents the same social movement. Duplication would have fragmented badly needed votes. That is why I did not join in until Malek faced real difficulties in getting the required signatures. Then, I decided to participate and I was able to gather 222,000 signatures in a short time from 40 of the 48 electoral districts.

The new electoral law states that a presidential candidate should be able to get 75,000 signatures from 25 electoral districts, which practically means that I'm ahead of other candidates, except for President Lamine Zeroual.

How do you view the "National Charter Group" and its Rome document?

The parties involved in this document claim to be leftists and democratic. But, the overall agreement accepted the implementation of *Shari'a*, which means that they have come under the umbrella of the FIS. They believe that the security issue does not exist because they have allied themselves with the FIS.

They also claim to represent 80 per cent of Algerians. I wonder why they do not take part in the elections if they have such wide popular base and no security problem. I believe that they are scared to put themselves to a real test.

The coming elections will bring to light new political forces by redistributing the cards of the political game in the country. I expect that only three parties will survive — those representing the three powerful pillars of this society — one representing the regime, another the Islamic trend and a third for the national democratic republic.

If you win the elections, what will be your priorities on the political and economic levels?

On the political level, the establishment of a regime that has a credible republican framework will be my first priority. I will work towards amending several constitutional statutes to limit the president's authority. I'm planning to form a government with a clear political agenda, rather than a government of technocrats.

On the social level, my first priority will be our youth, whom I believe are the core of the problem in Algeria. This is what the assassinated former President Mohamed Boudiaf tried to do. A lot of the family legislation has to be changed as well. The present family law has deprived women of their basic rights, despite the undeniable role of Algerian women throughout our modern history.

On the economic level, I believe that we need to head for the market economy. This needs a new economic mentality and it should be presented and discussed thoroughly with the workers' unions to ensure effective implementation of such economic policies and find solutions for the acute unemployment problem.

How do you see Algeria's international relations, and what sort of a future relationship do you intend to maintain with France?

The cancellation of the Chirac-Zeroual meeting reflects the tense relations between the two countries. I'm afraid that the bitterness of our past colonial ties with France is still overshadowing the need to build up new and mature contacts. It is thus inevitable for Algerians to enhance their relationships with other European countries like Italy and Spain. Nonetheless, our ties with France should be kept intact.

Jihad leader slain

HEAD of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Fathi Shakaki, was buried yesterday at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus.

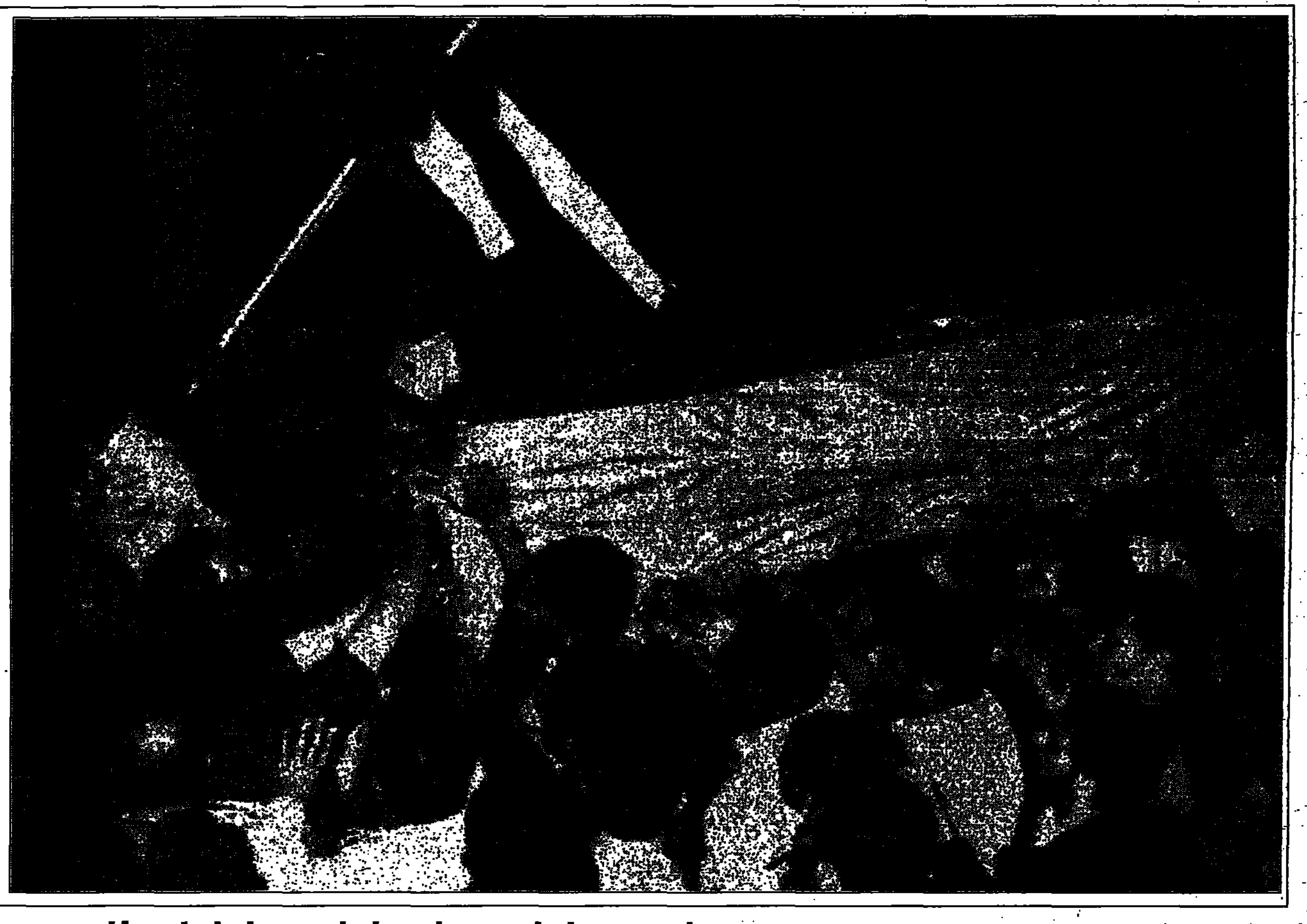
The Jihad leader was shot dead in Malta last Thursday. The Islamist organisation blames Israeli agents for his death.

Malta's prime minister condemned the "cold-blooded murder" while Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip closed shops and demonstrated in protest at the killing.

Israel has neither confirmed nor denied that it played a role in Shakaki's death, but Jihad supporters have vowed to avenge his assassination.

Islamic Jihad is opposed to the current peace process and has claimed responsibility for suicide bombings that have killed dozens of Israelis in the wake of the September 1993 PLO-Israeli peace accord.

(photo: Reuters)



Strange bedfellows in Beirut

An unlikely team, Hezbollah and President Hrawi, but the signs are that something new is brewing in Lebanon, Ghassan Mukahhal, writes from Beirut

Is it a coincidence that Elias Hrawi's presidency has been extended for three more years at the time when Israel and Hezbollah are involved in fierce fighting in South Lebanon? How can one explain the silence of Israeli officials over this issue?

The latest operations of Hezbollah in the south are nothing new. For the past *few years, the unsettled situation* in South Lebanon as well as the character of the Islamic party itself have provided the means and support needed for fighting the Israeli occupation. Yet, the nature of the latest operations, their intensity, size and timing, are rather unique, especially compared with previous campaigns.

A Lebanese politician, who is close to Damascus, says that the events in the south have helped distance Israel from the political debate over the constitutional amendment, which paved the way for Hrawi's re-election. The amendment and the extension of Hrawi's presidential term took place at a time when the Israeli army was licking its wounds, and stood in fear of once again "*drowning in the Lebanese* swamp," as one Israeli official put it. That is why the battle over the presidency and the re-election of Hrawi constituted the first significant political event in Lebanon to escape Israeli interference.

The Lebanese politician added that before the extension of the presidential term, *Israel had worked hard to stir up* political upheaval in Lebanon and to draw attention to the Syrian role. Its aim was to revive the hopes of some politicians for a foreign partner that could change the present equation in Lebanon.

The Israeli media has given space to Lebanese politicians opposed to Syria — like former President Amin Jumayel and General Michel Aoun. However, the constitutional amendment and the re-election procedures have passed for the first time without foreign interference — with the exception of the Syrians, of course.

In the past, Israel used to either impose nominees, as was the case with Lebanon's late President Bashir Jumayel, or cause political turmoil, as demonstrated when former President Amin Jumayel stepped down and during Gen. Aoun's *de facto* assumption of power.

The deteriorating security situation in the south was behind the distance Israel has kept from the Lebanese political arena. Such a stance will have drastic consequences for Lebanon in general and the role of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah in particular, especially prior to any settlement between Syria and Israel. Hezbollah's role had formerly been that of a fundamentalist force committed to fighting Israeli forces in South Lebanon. However, the latest clashes have catapulted the party into the heart of the country's political map. There have been many indications of this new role, which signals a qualitative change in the Islamists' strategy. In contrast to their past history, there has been a sudden rapprochement between the party and Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Previously, the two sides were in conflict, climaxing in a war of words launched by Hezbollah over Hariri's economic plans for the reconstruction of Lebanon. Hezbollah accused the prime minister of serving Israel's economic projects in the region. Hezbollah officials now talk of the inevitability of the reconstruction programme, especially in the *southern part of Beirut which is mainly* populated by Shi'ites.

Hezbollah has even come closer to President Hrawi. Press reports have hinted at the possibility of an electoral coalition between the two sides in the Bekaa Valley in the parliamentary elections due next year. Hrawi is originally from Zahle, the main city in the Bekaa province, which happens to be the stronghold of Hezbollah's main parliamentary bloc and the centre of their popular and political base.

The coalition between the president and the party was clearly illustrated in the support of the party's parliamentary bloc for an extension of Hrawi's term in office. The party had previously opposed the extension and insisted on holding presidential elections. Ibrahim Al-Amin, head of the party bloc, explained the shift as being in the interest of the resistance movement. Some observers have, however, interpreted Hezbollah's *stand* as a response to a Syrian request.

Yet others point out that the party need *not have voted in favour because its 10* MPs would not have affected the overall result. Moreover, it is not clear that voting against the amendment would have threatened the party's ties with Syria.

It is possible that the party was promised a role in the Lebanese government that might be a ministerial one. It may have also been enticed by the promise that it would be recognised as the political representative of the Shi'ites, side by side with the Amal movement headed by the Speaker of the House Nabih Berri.

Sources believe that leaders of Hezbollah, encouraged by both Iran and Syria, have started to outline its role in a post-peace settlement era. But questions over Hezbollah's strategy *remain, throwing* a shadow over the future of the party in the event of an Israeli-Syrian peace accord and an Israeli withdrawal from Golan and South Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah is adopting a policy of unprecedented political participation, which implies that its "moderate" wing has succeeded in imposing its *view on the so-called "radicals"* who reject even the entity of the Lebanese state. For the first time, Hezbollah is seeking to exploit for political ends its military activities in the south. The previous parliamentary elections, in which the party became the leading parliamentary bloc, laid the groundwork for that policy.

The writer is the Middle East editor of the Lebanese newspaper Al-Safir.

Zayed's bid cold-shouldered

The UAE's call for reconciliation with Iraq has been cold-shouldered on Capitol Hill, writes Thomas Gorguissian in Washington

During the last few weeks Iraq has been back in the American media and in the briefings of the US State Department. The overwhelming "yes" of the Iraqi presidential referendum was the focus of press coverage and officials' comments. However, the Arab media has been highlighting a campaign started last week by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to ease the UN sanctions imposed against Iraq for the past five years.

Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan, the UAE ruler, has said that the time has come for Arab reconciliation and an end to the rift caused by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The presence of a large number of Western journalists during the referendum provided the Baghdad government with a good opportunity to underscore the sufferings of the Iraqi people. In their reports, journalists made clear the fact that the Iraqis are terribly hurt by the sanctions, even if their leader is not.

On the Arab side, Qatar, along with the Arab League Secretariat, Egypt, Yemen and Sudan, have welcomed the UAE call. But Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain have insisted that sanctions remain. For the US, when it comes to lifting the sanctions or at least to easing them, the official stance shows no change, though the humanitarian angle is widely debated.

US officials continue to insist that it is Saddam who is to blame for the sufferings of the Iraqi people. According to conventional wisdom in Washington, there will be no change in this position in the near future, and definitely nothing during the election year. No one, especially in the Clinton administration, is ready to take that step.

While some Arab newspapers welcomed the UAE initiative, this side of the Atlantic reacted with near silence. *The New York Times*, in one of its recent editorials wrote, the embargo "has brought malnutrition and misery to the Iraqi people, while Saddam Hussein and his favoured friends continue to live in royal splendor". After mentioning various "compelling reasons to keep the sanctions intact," the editorial concludes, "Unless Baghdad changes its ways and honestly fulfills its arms control commitments, the embargo will not end any time soon".

Concerning the new call to lift the sanctions, a State Department official told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Saddam Hussein is responsible for the suffering of Iraq's people. He chose to reject UN Resolution 986 which gives Iraq the opportunity to procure food and medicine for the Iraqi people. We regret Saddam's decision. We would also note that individual states are free to provide food and medicine to Iraq on a grant basis. [There is] no objection to their doing so."

However, he repeated the official line that, "We do not agree this is a time to consider a modification of the sanctions. Iraq remains grossly out of compliance with UN Security Council resolutions as demonstrated by recent UNSCOM discoveries," he said, referring to the document recently reported to the Security Council by the UN special commission for implementing the UN resolution on Baghdad's arms arsenal, UNSCOM.

The report stated that the regime continues to conceal research on lethal biological weapons even after its nuclear and chemical warfare programmes have been dismantled.

Nevertheless, many Middle East experts do not agree with the official stand, especially as it is the Iraqi people and not Saddam who are the ones being punished. Commenting on the recent Sheikh Zayed initiative, Michael Collins Dunn, the editor of the bi-weekly US journal *The Estimate*, told the *Weekly*, "It does not seem that anything has been done to persuade the US or Britain — the two Security Council powers that have been most resistant — to ease the sanctions." The French, Russians and *Chinese* have been *looking* at ways to ease the embargo for some time. But, according to Dunn, it is basically the US and the UK that are the problem, so long as Saddam is in power.

Regardless of how many Arab states call for an easing of sanctions, without the two key states of Saudia Arabia and Kuwait it is hard for any observer to picture real changes in the American position while Saddam remains in power, Dunn added.

However, he said, "I do not see Bill Clinton getting soft on Iraq in an election year, and therefore, even if the Kuwaitis started urging it, *I think* there will be some problems in persuading the US to go along."

A US official was quoted recently by the US Information Agency as saying that Iraq is far from cooperating with the UN, adding, "UNSCOM is not in a position to close the files on any category of weapons of mass destruction — chemical, nuclear, biological and missiles... Some in the (Security) Council were working with Iraq to pressure the UNSCOM to declare a base line (limit) for these categories. We resisted that, and it has proved to have been wise."

This criticism reflects to a great extent the hardline stand taken by the US Ambassador to the UN Madeline Albright, who argues that Iraq has cheated and lied to the international community. She advised, "If they wish to be respected ever again by the inter*national community*, they should cooperate."

Grim future for Iraq

Toppling Saddam Hussein may not improve relations between Iraq and the West, warns the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Amr Abdel-Sami' in London reviews its recent report

Whether Saddam Hussein is in power or not, the future of Iraq looks as bleak as its present. A recent report published by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) shows that Iraq, with or without Saddam, will remain estranged from the West and caught in an economic and humanitarian dilemma for a long time to come.

According to this report, the likelihood of Saddam's being ousted in the near future is minimal. The IISS said that Saddam's survival instinct which depends mainly on his "manipulative capabilities" and pragmatic attitude have added to the complicated nature of the regime. Despite the Kurdish and Shi'ite unrest and even the defection of close associates, the Sunni regime remains well intact. The IISS rules out any major role for the fragmented Iraqi opposition, which lacks a popular base. However, the three major pillars of Iraqi society could function as a potential opposition force from within. These are the Ba'ath party, the security forces and the army. The ousting of Saddam will need the involvement of these three pillars, led by the army.

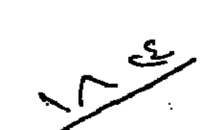
The Iraqi army is the major source of military power in the country. It *was humiliated during the Gulf* War *and* has *since paid a high price for* the president's adventure with the pressure of the UN-imposed sanctions bearing down upon it.

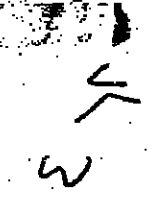
But the army has several difficulties to overcome. The very loyal Republican Guards and Saddam's newly established commandos are among the obstacles to an army coup.

Nevertheless, the success of a military coup will not be the end of the story for either the Iraqis or the world community, "Iraqi society has been so atomised, brutalised and impoverished, spiritually and materially, that *it is difficult to see any civil society emerging," said the IISS* report.

Moreover, any attempt at power sharing would entail the use of force "which can hardly promote democracy," in addition to producing instability in both Iraq and the region. The international community also has its place in this gloomy picture. It is unlikely that the Iraqi opposition or any new faces in Baghdad will be able to promote ties with the West despite their declared intentions. As the IISS concludes, "The bitter heritage of long years of sanctions imposed by the West" may furnish the way for an anti-Western trend in this society.

Edited by **Mervat Diab**





This is America speaking

The Senate's Jerusalem bill comes as no surprise, writes **Ahmed Sidki Al-Dajani**. Congress has been scheming for some time to give official sanction to Israel's occupation of the city



Once again the American Senate has passed a bill regarding Jerusalem. In blatant violation of the principles of international legitimacy, it constitutes another slap in the face of the Arab nation, of which Arab Palestine, with its Muslim and Christian citizens, is an integral part, and a slight to their many other Muslim and Christian supporters. It also belies previous American pledges of commitment.

The preamble is replete with Zionist claims that have no logical or historical foundation. Its unconditional endorsement of the audacious presumption, of "Israel's historical prerogative to the city of Jerusalem over any Muslim or Christian claims," as news agencies reported, purposefully denies the fact that Jerusalem and Palestine are the national home of the Arab Palestinian people — Muslims, Christians and Jews alike — and part of the greater Arab nation.

One's sense of outrage mounts as one reads the three articles the bill contains. The first, stipulating that "Jerusalem remain undivided", sanctions the Israeli occupation of West Jerusalem in 1948 and its occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967. The second recognises Jerusalem as the international capital of Israel. The third commits the American administration to moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by 31 May 1999 at the latest. It further allocates the necessary funds for this and requires the administration to submit a progress report to Congress every six months. The bill, introduced by the Senate majority leader and Republican party presidential candidate, Robert Dole, was passed in the Senate by an overwhelming majority of 93 votes. Only five opposed.

Official reactions from around the Arab World *ranged in tone from shock to* dismay. Some remained entirely silent. At the same time, the press began to speculate whether the law would affect the *settlement talks* that come under that ironic label "the Middle East peace process". Would it obstruct the current Israeli-Palestinian talks? What is the future of Jerusalem in light of this law? Will the question of Jerusalem remain an item for negotiation?

The first thought that occurred to me, as journalists asked my response to these and several other questions regarding the bill, was that it should have come as no surprise. We have as a precedent US Senate Resolution 106 of 23 March 1990. In an article I wrote that day and which later appeared in my book, "The Palestinian *Intifada* and Crisis Management", I said *that the resolution contained* "spurious opinions that made a mockery of international legitimacy, distorted the facts and spelled out the final reckoning with the Bush administration".

After commenting on the contents of the preamble and the resolution's three articles, I concluded, "Thus the American Congress has delivered a stinging blow to the Palestinians, to Arab and Islamic nations and to Muslims and Christians. Then it still expects us to continue to work toward peace regardless of this gross violation of international legitimacy and flagrant disregard for UN Resolution 252 concerning the status of Jerusalem and other international resolutions."

In short, the American Congress has been scheming to give official sanction to Israel's occupation of Jerusalem *for some time. This recent* law, intended to grant unrestricted license for the completion of the Judaisation of the city, is only one link in a *chain of events that began in* the wake of the 1967 War, when the *de facto* realities Israel imposed on the ground received whole-hearted American support in the UN Security Council through its Jewish-American representative Arthur Goldberg.

In the spring of this year we saw another link play itself out when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin moved to confiscate "Arab Palestinian" land in and around Jerusalem in order to build "Jewish housing". The undisguised racism behind this bid to expand Jewish settlements also received America's blessing in the Security Council where Madeleine Albright used America's veto to stop a resolution *condemning — in the* mildest terms — Israel's action.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the American Senate*'s latest action is its tim*ing. The new bill was passed only four weeks after the Taba-Washington accord on transitional Palestinian autonomy was signed in the White House. During the talks, the US committed itself in principle to include the status of Jerusalem on the agenda of the final phase of peace negotiations.

The new bill also coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the UN, which has so much to celebrate while so many of its resolutions and principles are being trampled underfoot. Nor did any notions of hospitality prevent the passing of the bill at a time when several Arab and Muslim rulers, with commitments to their own people, were visiting Washington.

Moreover, it came just as the Pope completed his tour of the US and shortly before the economic summit in Amman, towards which the US rallied all its forces for the success of its concept of a new Middle East order headed by Israel. Consideration for the sensitivities of others was the last thing in their mind.

Or was it? US policymakers are reputed for their "detailed calculations" before embarking *on any action.* That is why they have so many research centres. How else can we explain the Senate's precision timing? What message *does it really* want to convey to the Arabs, who have the rightful claim to Jerusalem?

American policy decisions are the product of what might be considered the "net yield" of internal and external factors. If internal factors prevail, they determine the course of action. Conversely, they must be brought under control when external exigencies dominate.

Senator Dole, himself, offers us a most distinctive model. When he visited this region in 1990, in the wake of the Senate's Resolution 106, the Arab World displayed the necessary minimum degree of cohesion in its condemnation of the resolution. Perceiving this, *Dole confessed that it* would be wrong to vote along with the Republican minority in the house at that time and he condemned the "frivolity" of American congressmen who "make decisions while they're taking off their jackets and sign documents they never read".

Yet, when it comes to listening to the powerful Zionist lobby which finances so many of the senators' electoral campaigns, then that, of course, is another matter, particularly when there is no "external factor" to counterbalance it. Then Arab fears, disappointment and anger *carry no weight*, not because the Arabs do not have the ability to affect American policy decisions, but because the Americans have suc*ceeded in neutralising them* by pitting them against each other. The current fragility of the Arab League epitomises the lack of concerted resolve needed to shift the balance of forces required to shift American policy more in their favour.

It's a tough message the American Senate is sending us with this bill: "You don't count for much right now, so accept our terms, comply with the plans we're going to impose anyway and resign yourselves to accepting Israel as our authorised agent in the region." This is America speaking — a young nation turned major power with the mentality of a cowboy, chin thrust forward, arrogant, and always ready on the draw. Under its wing stands the expansionist Zionist state, nodding its head, with a malicious grin playing on its face.

For the time being we lack the collective will to stand up to this. Even if some individual countries had the capacity to redress the insult such resolutions and bills represent, there are still too many reports that reveal a lifeline to the American economy and to American *military defence.*

Yet, this will not remain the case for long at the unofficial level. Popular will has different ways of expressing itself. *Now more* than ever it is firmly entrenched in the public mind that Israel could not continue as it does without America, and the West in general, to back it up. We also have people who know that we have at our disposal the popular and national resources that can give preponderance to that "external factor" that affects US decision-making.

It is up to all of us to assess the cards we have carefully so that we can persuade the US to relinquish the anti-Arab attitudes it displays. An Arab response is imminent. Moreover, it will focus on the many flaws of the current peace process, because this is a mechanism which the American-Israeli alliance devised to shore up Israel's occupation of Jerusalem.

The write is a prominent Palestinian scholar and member of the PLO's Central Council.

Peace betrayed

Congress's Jerusalem bill and the insult to PLO leader Yasser Arafat may have been a cheap election ploy, but the cost will be born in terms of US credibility in the region, warns **James Zogby**



The Congressional passage of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 and the insulting behaviour of New York City's mayor toward PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat both point to some disturbing realities in US domestic politics.

Pro-Likud sentiment runs deep in some important sectors of the US Jewish community, and has a strong influence in shaping policy and attitudes on key issues.

According to the US Jewish press, Senate majority leader and front runner for the Republican presidential nomination, Robert Dole, pushed his Jerusalem bill under the influence of Robert Asher — a former president of the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC) and a major campaign financier — and New York's Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato. D'Amato himself receives significant support from the strongly conservative elements of New York's Jewish community, and is a supporter of Likud's right-wing politics.

The logic behind Dole's move was clear. The legislation was designed to help erase the bad feelings held by some in the American Jewish community towards Dole because of the senator's past voting record on Middle East issues. It would also position him to the right of the other Republican presidential hopefuls, and help clear the path for victory in the important New York primary election.

Given the Clinton administration's opposition to the embassy move, Republicans also hope to make the issue a "wedge" to divide Jewish and Christian fundamentalist voters from the Democratic coalition in the 1996 elections.

Despite the fact that the majority of American Jews support the peace process and, in a recent opinion, oppose efforts to move the embassy at this time, Republicans know that the fear and prejudice of the past are more powerful emotions than hope and understanding. By tapping into those feelings, Republicans expect to be able to silence strong opposition to their move.

Even the Labour government in Israel and leading American Jewish organisations, which either opposed the move or were ambivalent about its timing, were ultimately neutralised or forced into adopting a supportive stand.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, facing a tough fight against Likud to retain control of the government in Israel's 1996 elections, was not willing to cede credit for the victory in the US Congress. And so Rabin joined Jerusalem's Likud mayor in Washington to receive a copy of the passed legislation from Senator Dole.

*In light of the tremendous domestic political stakes in this is*sue, it is important to appreciate the position taken by the Clinton administration. At first it lobbied long and hard to withhold Democratic support for the bill. When it became apparent that the bill was certain to pass (because the Republicans hold a majority in both the *House and Senate* and were *supported* by a small but influential group of pro-Israel Democrats), the administration successfully negotiated a change in the language of the bill.

It is critical to note that the bill that finally passed through Congress is a toothless version of the original Dole bill. What was most dangerous about the original version of the bill was not just that it called for the moving of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, but that it provided a rigid timeline for both the move and the construction of a new embassy and that it imposed tough sanctions against the State Department's budget if the timeline was not kept.

The administration's negotiations with the Senate not only succeeded in removing the timeline and the sanctions, they also gave the president the authority to delay implementation of the bill if he finds that constructing the embassy would constitute a threat to the national interests of the US.

Upon passage of the Dole bill, President Clinton issued a strongly worded statement opposing the legislation, characterising it as "a mistake that could undermine the peace process". He made clear that he would neither sign nor implement the bill. Since 90 per cent of both the Senate and House had voted for the legislation, Clinton knew he could not sustain a veto of the bill; but by using the right of waiver, which he had succeeded in adding to the legislation, the administration can delay it indefinitely.

By any measure, the Congressional legislation is an obnoxious insult to Arabs and Mus*lims. It undercuts US credibility and threatens the legitimacy of the US sponsored peace pro*cess. It also contributes to deepening the enmity toward the West that is widespread in the Middle East. While leaders in the region may understand the complications of US domestic politics and the resolve of the administration to prevent the legislation from disrupting the peace process, to most Arabs and Muslims the legislation is simply another evil action taken *by Americans against the firmly held belief in Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic identity. The an*ger and demoralisation that this has caused must be taken into account in any understanding of the legislation's consequences.

For the time being, Likud and its allies have won. They have demonstrated their residual power in Congress; and Congress has demonstrated its inability to rise above crass election year pandering.

But despite all of this, the time-bomb created by the Jerusalem legislation has a fuse that can be extended indefinitely. Its length will be determined by the extent to which Arabs and Muslims work, even at this late date, to convince the administration and the American people of the danger of an early embassy move.

If pressure from Israel and pro-Likud elements in the American Jewish community continue to mount without being countered by equally strong pressure from Arabs and Muslims which makes clear the danger such a move would pose to peace and US-Arab relations, the administration may find it difficult to continually utilise its right to waiver.

In real sense, the fight for Jerusalem is not over, but is entering another phase. For the Palestinians, this phase will require tough negotiations and most probably some effort at effective mass action in demand of their rights. From the US side, of course, all is a matter of politics: to win, Arabs must be committed to play a game in which morality and reason are not the trump cards — political power is all that matters.

It is important to note that the Jerusalem legislation received only scant attention from the US press. It was eclipsed in the headlines and on editorial pages by the crude insult New York City Mayor Rudolf Giuliani delivered to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Giuliani, a Republican, won the 1993 mayoral race with strong support from some segments of the city's Jewish community. He owed this support in part to an alliance with Democratic New York State Legislator Dov Hikind.

Hikind is a leader of the emerging Orthodox Jewish community. He is not only a Likud supporter, but also a Jewish Defence League leader and a big contributor to Gush Emunim settlement activity. Hikind's support for Giuliani was, in part, a reflection of the deepening division between New York's Orthodox Jews and the African-American community. This divide was a major undercurrent in the 1993 mayoral election in which Giuliani defeated incumbent Mayor David Dinkins, an African American.

By ordering Arafat to leave a city-sponsored concert in honour of the United Nations' 50th anniversary, Giuliani was less concerned with diplomacy than he was with continuing to please Hikind and his extremist constituency.

As in the case with Senator Dole's action, mainstream Jewish groups did not publicly challenge the mayor. Their silence is an indication that while those organisations support the peace process and have met with Chairman Arafat, they have not yet found the courage to speak out against nominally pro-Israel moves that damage the peace process, or to defend the PLO Chairman — even though it was through Arafat's leadership that peace became pos*sible.*

To their credit, both the administration and the national press roundly rebuked the mayor. The White House and the State Department both denounced Giuliani's undiplomatic insult to the "leader of the Palestinian people" and the press in its editorials called the mayor crude, inhospitable and insulting to the Palestinians, to New York and to the American people.

A New York *newspaper made clear that this was not the first time a New York mayor has* insulted Arabs in a crude effort to win votes. In the 1950s Mayor Robert Wagner snubbed Saudi Arabia's King Saud when he visited the city, in the 1960s Mayor Lindsay cancelled a dinner in the honour of King Faisal, and in the 1970s Mayor Ed Koch personally and publicly criticised President Jimmy Carter's Middle East peace proposal. But this was the first time that both the administration and the press combined to publicly rebuke a New York mayor for such obvious and insulting pandering.

Both the Jerusalem legislation and the New York mayor's actions are disgraceful, but they are also dangerous warning signs of a US political process that may be moving out of control.

In both instances Arab Americans have attempted to fight back. We organised against Dole's bill, mobilising allies in the Christian churches and speaking out in the press. But we were fighting an uphill battle, in part because our organisations are understaffed and overworked, and because we fought alone at times. There was no coordination with official Arab representatives and the counter-arguments to these ridiculous acts did not make their way into the national debate.

It is still not too late. We can rise above the Giuliani insult and turn it against the mayor, and we can, at least, mute the danger of the Dole bill. But doing so will require us to take seriously the American political arena. Quiet diplomacy from governments will *not work* (nor, for that matter, will violence or threats of violence from opposition groups). The only path to changing the current sad state of affairs is developing and implementing a political strategy that fully engages in the American political debate.

We can still save Jerusalem and our dignity, but first we must decide that we want to.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Poll chaos in Tanzania

Chaos, mistrust and frustration marked the first multi-party elections in Tanzania in more than 30 years. **Khaled Dawoud** reports from Dar Es-Salam

Disappointment reigned supreme as six leading opposition parties in Tanzania, declaring they had lost confidence in the National Election Commission (NEC) responsible for handling the first multi-party elections in the country in 30 years, called for an immediate transitional government.

Since the early hours of Sunday morning, nine million Tanzanians queued up to cast their votes. But in place of order they found irregularity. In many areas throughout the country, voting did not commence on time and in Dar Es-Salam, the capital, citizens were able to cast their votes only in three constituencies. As a result, the NEC announced that the Dar Es-Salam region will vote again next week, though an exact date has yet to be announced.

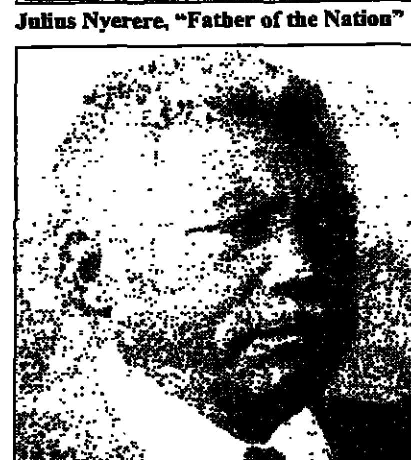
The target of fierce criticism, the NEC Chairman, Justice Lewis Makame, denied responsibility of the chaotic poll, and rejected demands by opposition parties that he should resign. Makame blamed the presiding officers in charge of the polling stations for the lack of organisation and inefficiency which marked the voting process. He said his commission had been let down by presiding officers at the district level. "I have no reason to resign," he said, "because I have not failed."

But a statement released by Tanzania's six leading opposition parties. said, "The above political parties have observed that the election has been rigged and thus its results won't stand for the wishes of the Tanzanians. Because of this, the opposition parties no longer have confidence in the National Electoral Commission and its employing government of Tanzania."

The six parties are the National Convention for Construction and Reform-Mageuzi (NCCR-Mageuzi), Chama Cha Democrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), the Civic United Front (CUF), National League for Democracy (NLD), the National Reconstruction Alliance (NLA) and the Union for Multi-Party Democracy of Tanzania (UMD). The statement went on: "Therefore, the parties have concluded that a transitional government under the Attorney General should be put in place immediately, involving all political parties in Tanzania. The transitional government should make arrangements for new general elections at the convenient time."



Julius Nyerere, "Father of the Nation"



President Ali Hassan Mwinji



Presidential candidate, Mrema, casts his vote

The general belief in Dar Es-Salam, and among representatives of donor nations who financed the elections at a cost of $20 million, was that the chaos marring the elections resulted from incompetence and negligence on the part of both the NEC and the presiding officers.

Among the factors contributing to the confusion was a marked lack of election materials, a shortage of ballot boxes, ballot papers, voter registry and non-payment of allowances to the presiding officers and other support staff. By Monday, almost 100 polling centres had not conducted the voting due to a boycott by presiding officers who had not been paid.

To iron out matters, Justice Makame said his commission is now working to ensure that ballot papers, different from those used in last Sunday's exercise, are printed as soon as possible.

The dissatisfaction with the voting process was not limited to opposition parties. Benjamin Mkapa, the presidential candidate for the ruling Chama Cha Mepinduzi (CCM) party joined the storm of protest, saying, "The process in Dar Es-Salam is not going well. We have confidence in the NEC and expect them to get things right."

Mkapa is one of four presidential candidates contesting the elections along with 13 registered political parties competing for 232 parliamentary seats. The four candidates are CCM's Mkapa, Augustine Mrema of NCCR-Mageuzi, Ibrahim Lipumba of CUF and John Cheyo of UDP. But despite assurances by Makame, opposition party members are seemingly steadfast in their criticism and demands for a transitional government. The CUF's Lipumba held a press conference on Tuesday announcing his full support for the statement released by the six opposition parties.

"Monday's general elections were rigged and, therefore, not free or fair," he told reporters. "The NEC has made Tanzania a laughing stock before the whole world."

Consultations among the opposition parties, according to Lipumba, will continue to determine what they would do in case the government refused the demand for a transitional government.

"I do not accept the NEC's claim that the major problems in the election process, including inadequate ballot papers, were confined to the Dar Es-Salam region only. Delays in opening polling stations were a nation-wide phenomenon," he said.

He also warned that announcing election results in a few constituencies, while others had yet to vote, will influence voter participation. "The NEC should accept the existence of many irregularities, and resign," Lipumba stated.

The opposition's fears that mainland elections would be rigged stem from events in Zanzibar where presidential and parliamentary elections were held earlier on 22 October. The CCM won a narrow victory over its main opponent, the CUF, after a tedious vote counting and recounting process.

The CCM's presidential candidate, Salmin Amour, defeated his CUF opponent, Seif Sharif Hamad, by a 0.4 per cent margin. Amour received 165,271 votes while Hamad won 163,706 votes. Although Hamad said he was certain the elections were rigged, he called on his followers not to riot.

Despite the delays and voter frustration, no incidents of violence, except for one in Dar Es-Salam, were reported. In this incident, voters attacked a car loaded with four sealed ballot boxes, parliamentary and presidential ballot papers and 2.7 million Tanzanian shillings in cash ($4,000). Voters believed the car was sent by the ruling CCM party to disrupt the election process at the polling centre.

Although no official results are available, observers of the elections believe the real race for the presidency to be between the CCM's Mkapa and the NCCR's Mrema, who enjoys a wide base of support in regions like Kilimanjaro and Arusha. Mkapa is seen as a shadow of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, who is known as the "father of the nation". Mkapa has presented himself as the "man of the people".

According to unofficial results collected from 12 constituencies where voting did take place, the CCM was leading in both the presidential and parliamentary elections. The results, released by the International Press Centre set up by the government shortly before the elections, showed that Mkapa led in these 12 constituencies with 63.6 per cent. Lipumba followed with 26 per cent, Mrema with 9.2 per cent and Cheyo with 1.2 per cent. Although the final results were expected to be released on 5 November, the election chaos has left the final date open and hinging on the opposition approval of the NEC decision to hold a new round of voting in Dar Es-Salam.

Democracy's long and winding road

If Tanzania can weather the storms that often precede full democratisation, pluralism may quickly replace ethnic tension and one-party politics, suggests **Mohamed Khalid**

Ideally, Tanzanians hoped that their multi-party elections, the first in the country in 30 years, would place their country in the fraternal order of 36 other African nations which have held democratic elections since 1990.

The challenges faced by the country in conducting the elections are immense, but so too are the rewards. Mohamed Mzale, Tanzania's Ambassador to Egypt told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The major challenge is to conduct a free and fair election which would leave people convinced that the winner is the true winner."

But with the elections marred by serious inconsistencies and poor organisation, opposition parties are openly voicing their grievances and an ideal situation has become a fantasy.

The real issue, however, is whether these problems are surprising. Tanzania is the product of a union between two countries, Zanzibar and Tanganyika. Zanzibar has its own president and government within the union while Tanganyika is ruled directly through the union government. The general election is carried out for the union's presidency, the union's Parliament, the presidency of Zanzibar and Zanzibar's House of Representatives. Within that mix of posts, nine parties compete, but the forerunners are the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the Civic United Front (CUF) and the National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR).

Tanzania's arduous transition to democracy is not unique in the continent. Like many other African countries, the liberation front that led the struggle against colonialism ruled after independence and went on to implement a one-party system.

Also similar to other African nations, the one-party system, established by Tanzania's first president and "father of the nation", Julius Nyerere, retarded the development of civil society, including opposition parties.

The present government, led by Ali Hassan Mwinji, succeeded Nyerere, who voluntarily stepped down 10 years ago after ruling since Tanzania's independence in 1961.

Nyerere, who became the head of the ruling party and the government after independence, enjoyed the immense powers granted the president under the 1962 constitution. Nyerere believed the state to be an expression of the unity and general will of its citizens.

According to Jeanette Hartmann, a political analyst focusing on Tanzania, Nyerere's concept of government "excluded the heterogeneous interests and divisions that existed in the country. Via the party, he managed to superimpose a homogenous ideology that would bind the people together in a common political culture. He was very suspicious of factionalism and sectarianism because he felt that such disagreements would undermine the unity of the country. Accordingly, the political structures he evolved were meant to enhance the political order and unity."

While Nyerere's policies failed to construct a solid political system involving the participation of the masses or to realise the required economic development, he did make Tanzania the most stable and peaceful country in the continent.

He also invested heavily in education and industry, thereby creating a new urban middle and working class which clings tenaciously to a pronounced class consciousness. As a result, there was a growing sense of civil society, but at the same time, ethnic and religious tension resurfaced.

"Although Nyerere stepped down voluntarily," said Ambassador Mzale, "he is still very strong and alive, politically. Following the economic crisis in the early 1980s, it was decided that the best way to contain the deteriorating economic situation was to introduce a structural adjustment programme to solicit IMF support. Nyerere, who never accepted this, resigned to give others a chance."

Through the economic reform programme, Nyerere's successor, Mwinyi, promoted measures to introduce the country to a free market system. He also decentralised power and, in 1992, allowed the formation of political parties. His most recent move has been to dissolve the parliament and call for multi-party elections.

During his ten-year rule, Mwinyi has tried to maintain a delicate balance between the inherited one-party system and the newly liberalised free market policies.

"The complications in Tanzania," explained Samuel Chambua, a Tanzanian university lecturer, "are a product of two systems juxtaposed on each other, creating divergent points of political mobilisation and introducing ambiguities into the country's political life."

Chambua notes that "the socialist ideology coexists with pluralistic tendencies, ethnic politics and coalitions. The official policies coexist with a parallel market. Policies and statements are articulated in terms which are no longer believed or implemented. The coherence of social reality has been undermined."

Whether or not the current elections will bring to rest or resolve any of these issues remains to be seen, but also up for grabs is the future of the union between Zanzibar and Tanganyika after the elections are over.

"Some might criticise the union, but no one has rejected it," said Mzale. "Everyone truly believes that the union is necessary for stabilizing the whole nation. The debate really focuses on the role Zanzibar's government will play in Tanzania, and vice versa. In other words, will there be a structural change, or will the solutions be found within the existing structure?"

Whatever the outcome of the elections much still needs to be done to democratise and liberalise the political institutions while strengthening civil society so that ethnic tensions are resolved. To this end, maintained Mzala, "The CCM is willing to continue with the free market economic policies despite a belief in socialism and self-reliance. We see it [free market system] as a policy tool rather than a strategy."





FARAJ Balovshi, left, whose father was killed by 16-year old Philippine domestic worker, Sarah Balabgan, greets Sarah's mother outside the courthouse in Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates. The teenager, whose death sentence was commuted to a one-year jail sentence and 100 lashes, pleaded self-defence after claiming she was raped by her employer. *(photo: AP)*

Liberiadom gathered in

Gamal Nkrumah reports from New York on a United Nations sponsored conference on aid to Liberia that sought to remind the world that even as Washington pushes its plan to dispatch 20,000 US troops to Bosnia, Africa still matters

Last Friday, 27 October, a United Nations Conference on Assistance to Liberia was convened by the UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali at the Trusteeship Council, UN headquarters. The conference was convened in order to bring together Liberians and their regional and international partners in a collaborative venture that would critically assess the collaborative arrangements between Liberia and bilateral and multilateral humanitarian aid agencies and address and review relief and rehabilitation programmes.

Ghana's President Jerry John Rawlings and the Chairman of the provisional Liberian Council of State Wilton Sankawolo co-chaired the conference on international assistance to the war-torn West African nation of Liberia. Protracted speeches from participants inevitably led to repetitive narratives that often lurched down bootless byways.

As the UN Secretary-General, West African leaders and Liberians stepped up the hard sell of one of the African continent's most resource-rich countries, it dawned on all present that the enormous UN peacekeeping dues owned by the world's richest and most powerful nations which exceeded $2.29 billion in 1995 constituted something of an insurmountable hurdle.

The United States owed $880 million, Russia $490 million, Japan $197 million and France $101 million. It was these very nations that the Liberians had come to for help to finance their economic recovery and social rehabilitation programmes. It was these very nations that were expected to fund Liberia's peacekeeping operations.

Nevertheless, the conference brought into sharp focus the international community's double standards when dealing with civil wars. It was clear that in spite of the enormous humanitarian needs of Liberia, world attention was focused instead on the Bosnian crisis. It is as if the world insists that Africa's problems be kept at a distance. International preoccupation with the war in Bosnia could not be in sharper contrast with the world's lack of interest in Liberia.

The UN Secretary-General disclosed that the costs of peace-keeping in the former Yugoslavia for five days equaled the entire budget of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) for a year. He had long been an advocate of refocusing world attention on Africa. "This distortion in the use of UN resources demands correction. This conference offers an opportunity," he said. "The UN is committed to the early implementation of the Abuja Peace Agreement, but the decision to make peace rests, ultimately, with those who have made the war," the Secretary-General warned. He noted that comprehensive national political leadership was sorely needed in Liberia. "Reconciliation was the cornerstone of peace, and must be built upon with care and compassion," he added.

The Secretary-General alluded to the fact that Liberia had long been a forgotten emergency as resolving conflicts elsewhere had taken precedent. The UN's international peacekeeping budget is today estimated to exceed $3.1 billion. According to UN Development Programme (UNDP) studies, while most of Liberia's health infrastructure has been destroyed and most of its educational infrastructure is dysfunctional, international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been assisting in rice-planting, and subsistence farming has continued in rural areas. Rice is Liberia's staple food,crop, and achieving self-sufficiency in rice production is a priority for the country's recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

"The most immediate need in Liberia today is humanitarian assistance," the Secretary General said. With peace, previously inaccessible areas could be reached by aid convoys. "Essential services must be provided or rehabilitated."

But, recovery and rehabilitation require rapid action and the international community with support from financial institutions must play a major role, the Secretary General told the participants. He stressed that the capability of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG) must be assured. "Even a relatively small investment would bring significant benefits not only to Liberia but to the region and to Africa as a whole," he added.

Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, could not agree more. Sirleaf said in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "Implementation of the strategy for developing a comprehensive rehabilitation and recovery programme for Liberia demanded two parallel process. One process required Liberian authorities and interests to establish goals, reach consensus on the targets and agree on a realistic framework for achievement of these goals. The other process required Liberia's international partners to develop new methods of working together."

Sirleaf also stressed the need for the international community to bring greater coherence to external assistance so as to improve the performance of local Liberians involved in the process of rehabilitation and development.

Sirleaf was concerned though about the economic condition of Liberia today. "A fiscal regime which contemplates a fifty per cent surrender of foreign exchange earnings is likely to secure income for the government. Assertions that the Liberian dollar is still equal to the United States dollar are unlikely to encourage investors to return or to attract new ones," she said.

"The automatic reestablishment of the parastatals and the unchecked expansion of the administrative bureaucracy will almost certainly act as a drain on national resources," Sirleaf added.

She further argued that "the diversion of limited sources of foreign exchange will undermine the Liberian government's efforts to meet the wage and import bill." According to Sirleaf, "Telephones work in the Liberian capital Monrovia, but no where else, 80 per cent of water requirements are being met by deep wells of unacceptable quality. there is no electric power except that provided by personal generators. Shipping continues to be an important source of revenue, but the authorities estimate that only one-third of these resources end up in government coffers."

The fate of the West African region hinges on Liberia's destiny. Instability in Liberia means chaos in the region. Rawlings won a large measure of the participants' approval by apparently working tirelessly for the establishment of peace in Liberia.

With the conspicuous absence of the Nigerian military ruler General Sani Abacha from the conference, Nigeria's Foreign Minister Chief Tom Ikimi delivered an impassioned appeal for the warring factions to cease hostilities. Nigeria has been more heavily embroiled in the Liberian civil war than most of the neighbouring West African states bar Cote d'Ivoire.

Charles Taylor, the leader of the largest of Liberia's warring factions, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) has powerful backers in the Ivorian capital Abidjan. Several other smaller factions have similarly close ties with the powers that be in the Nigerian capital Abuja.

The rivalry between Abuja and Abidjan over determining the course of events in Liberia has led them to back rival factions. Poisonous identity politics practiced by local faction leaders were taken up by regional powers.

Both the Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Salim Ahmed Salim and the Under-Secretary General for Peace-Keeping Operations, Kofi Annan, made impassioned appeals for the regional backers of the rival warring Liberian factions to try and work for lasting peace.

The Liberian National Police falls under the jurisdiction of the Liberian Ministry of Justice, but it is only barely effective in the fifth of the country the Liberian government with ECOMOG-support controls. 60 per cent of the 1.5 million Liberians who stayed on in the country reside in the ECOMOG-controlled area. of the 2.5 million Liberians at home and abroad no less than 1.5 million are dependent on foreign humanitarian handouts. Close to a million Liberians fled to neighbouring West African countries.

Regional powers often use the UN as a convenient scapegoat for their lack of resolve. But, President Rawlings of Ghana in his capacity as the current chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a significant role in bringing the warring factions together. The fact that Ghana and Nigeria, with the largest contingencies in ECOMOG worked closely to harmonise their Liberian policy and led to the signing on 19 August 1995 of the thirteenth peace agreement between Liberia's warring factions in Abuja. Charles Talor was among the leaders who went to Monrovia on 21 August to set up a new Council of State on 1 September.

But, will this peace last? Sirleaf has no doubts because the transitional government includes all the principal parties. "I am very optimistic about the future because Liberians are now the decision makers," she told the *Weekly*. Does she harbour any political ambitions? "No," was the unequivocal answer. But, she said that she would continue to support the Liberian government through her present position with the UNDP.

To some, ECOMOG represents the sorely sought after ideal in the UN nowadays of how the devolution of peacekeeping authority to the regional level offers the best solution to resolve the numerous civil wars that rage on in the four corners of the globe. There are ten ECOMOG infantry battalions in Liberia today and its total logistical support package alone will cost around $133 million.

The demobilisation and reintegration into normal civilian life of an estimated 60,000 combatants, many of whom are children under the age of 15, was the subject of grave concern by the speakers. The Liberian civil war cost the lives of an estimated 150,000 — or about 15 per cent of the country's population. Chaos and lawlessness reigned supreme in Liberia, but the planned 30 August 1996 elections are scheduled to go ahead.

Doubts still linger on as there is no clear indication that Liberian faction leaders have stopped playing the dirty politics of rival tribal and religious identities. But, "Meeting the challenge of mobilising domestic and external resources will be largely determined by how Liberians demonstrate that transitional authorities utilise and account for the resources entrusted to them and allocated for recovery," Sirleaf said.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**





A united Canada

AFTER the 30 October referendum on Quebec's status, Canada narrowly survived, despite a mass pro-independence mobilisation drive. The mostly English-speaking federalists, backing national unity, came out ahead with a 50.6 per cent lead over the Francophone separatists' 49.4 per cent. With a margin of only 50,000 votes out of a 4.67 million total; Canada retained its largest province, home to one-quarter of its population.

Meanwhile, strong popular reactions marked the referendum's results. In downtown Montreal, fights erupted between hundreds of people from both sides (above). The street scene was chaotic. Windows of a downtown shopping centre were smashed and looters broke into stores snatching goods and vandalising the premises. Early Tuesday, the police reported arson at the headquarters of Daniel Johnson, a legislator heading the federalists in Quebec.

One of the leading supporters of secession, Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau, related the defeat to the big business vote — promoting multinational growth in a united Canada — and the immigrant vote. "It's true we have been defeated, but basically by what? By money and the ethnic vote", Parizeau said. "We (French Québécois, 82 per cent of the population) voted yes by a margin of 60 per cent." As earlier opinion polls projected, nine out of 10 English-speaking and immigrant Québécois voted no — they have historically felt marginalised by the French majority.

Canada's Prime Minister, a Québécois and strong supporter of a united Canada, invited Parizeau to discuss reforms. "We have every reason to be proud of a democracy where citizens can peacefully debate the very existence of their country", Chretien said. Premiers of several English-speaking provinces said it was time for Ottawa to seriously consider decentralisation projects that would give the provinces more autonomy.

(photo: Reuter)

Global pool or US tool?

Now half a century old, the United Nations has been criticised for not acting as a representative international body. Faiza Rady explains how the United States in particular has managed to use the organisation for its own ends

"The "abuse of authority" wielded by the United States and the four other permanent Security Council members has created a new colonialism within the very United Nations," Cuban President Fidel Castro told the General Assembly amidst overwhelming applause.

On the occasion of the UN's 50th anniversary, politicians representing more than 160 countries assembled in New York on 22 October for a three-day meeting to chart the organisation's future. Beyond the official speeches praising achievements by a score of UN agencies dealing with such global issues as hunger and disease, the status of women, human rights and the environment, the organisation has increasingly come under fire. In recent years, and especially after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, countries in the South have denounced America's manipulation of the UN for its own political purposes.

The UN's structure, which only grants executive power to the Security Council (SC), severely limits the organisation's function as a representative international body. While some critics only advocate institutional reforms, others question the UN's sponsoring of so-called deployment forces like Operation Desert Storm, a code name for the January 1991 US-led onslaught to end Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Such critics also denounce "peace-keeping" missions operating like partisan militias in conflict areas like Somalia and Bosnia, and challenge the organisation's ultimate legitimacy and purpose.

In the Arab world, UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has earned particular wrath for his alleged role as "Washington's man". Over the past few months, the Egyptian press has been filled with angry references to Ghali's subservient function. *Al-Shaab*, the mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, demanded that Ghali be stripped of his nationality for his three-year long inertia in Bosnia-Herzegovina which facilitated the genocide of Bosnian Muslims. The opposition paper *Al-Wafd* called for Ghali's "long-overdue resignation", arguing that he should have resigned the moment he understood the UN was incapable of defending the Muslim community.

Beyond the war of words and the angry editorials, Ghali himself somewhat obliquely admitted to the American inordinate economic, and hence political, control of the UN. "The organisation's excessive dependence on the assessments from a single member-state is unhealthy," he told the Associated Press in an 11 August interview. In fact, Washington's current contribution to the $1.2 billion annual budget and the $3 billion peacekeeping costs are each assessed at about 25 per cent.

Although the principle of the "sovereign equality of all member states" is inscribed in the UN Charter, granting every nation an equal vote in the General Assembly (GA), the non-binding character of its resolutions denies this body any material political weight.

Instead, executive power is vested in the SC, whose five permanent members — the US, Britain, France, Russia and China — control decision-making through their veto. "In practical terms, we know that certain states have profound influence on international events and relations while others do not," said Ghali.

Ever since the creation of the UN in 1945, Washington has used it to consolidate and expand its post-World War II gains. By 1945 America had gained superpower status; it produced about half of the world's gross product and was still the only nuclear power. Consequently, the US easily controlled the GA, which then only numbered 51 sovereign states, by cashing in on its wartime investments. On the other hand, US hegemony in the SC was systematically checked by the Soviet Union that vetoed 77 SC resolutions during the 1945-55 decade. It was only in 1950 when the USSR temporarily boycotted the SC, over its decision to exclude China and replace it with Formosa (present-day Taiwan), that the US was able to gather UN backing and military support for its invasion of Korea.

In the early 1970s, it was the US's turn to systematically block SC resolutions. During the '60s, the political composition of the GA changed when former Asian and African colonies joined the UN after achieving independence. At the time, countries in the South, mostly involved in the non-aligned movement, constituted a hostile majority in the GA which perceived the US as the major neo-colonialist nation. The configuration of power also changed in the SC, where the number of non-permanent members was increased from six to 10 in 1965; this allowed for the formation of anti-imperialist coalitions. The USSR and the communist camp supported such coalitions. The resolutions sponsored by these coalitions were routinely approved in the GA but never implemented because of the US veto in the SC.

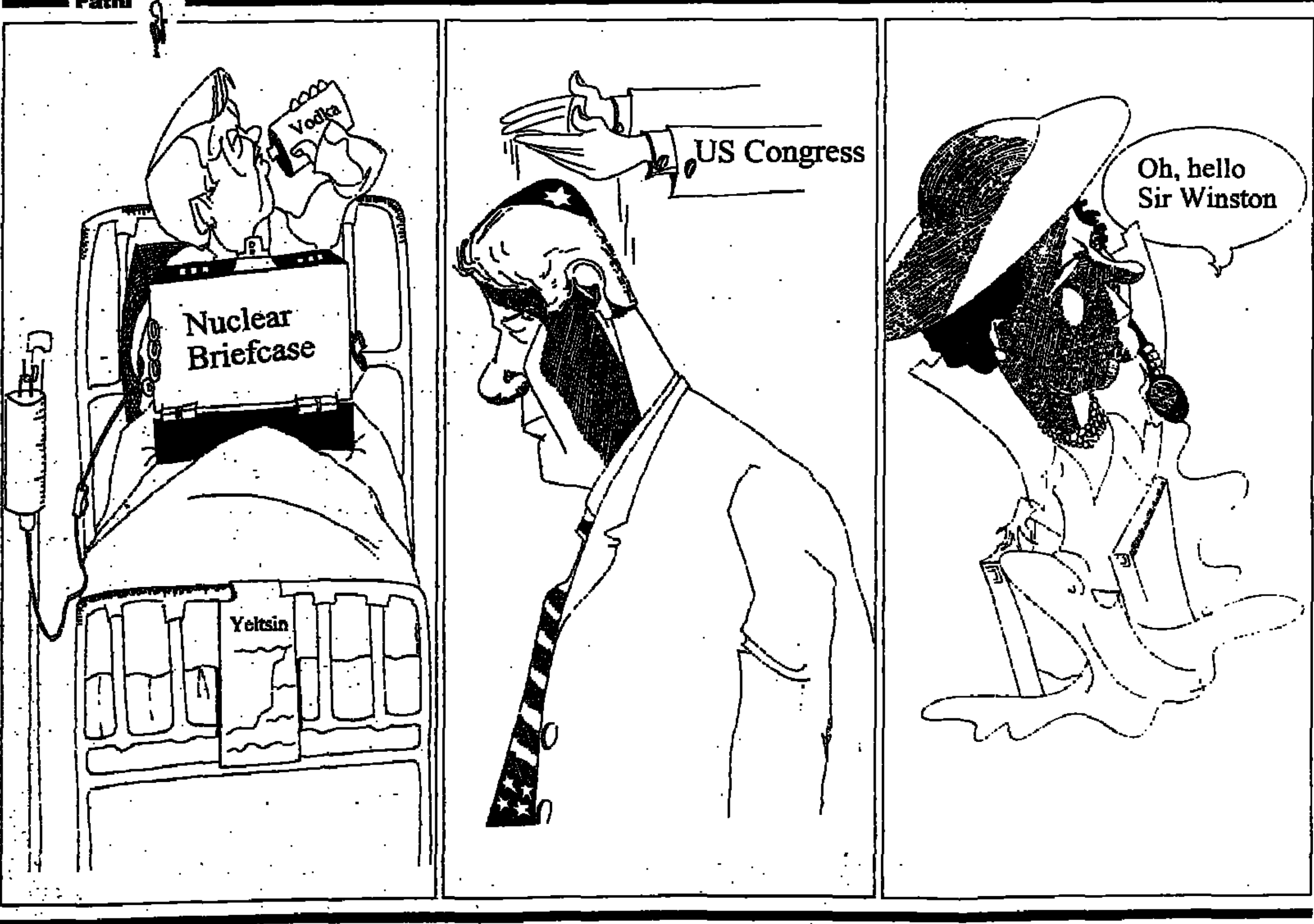
Nevertheless, nations of the South scored a major victory in the GA in 1974 by collectively appealing for the creation of a new and more equitable economic order. The following year, they voted to condemn Zionism as a "form of racism and racial discrimination". The US reaction to dissent from the South became increasingly virulent during Ronald Reagan's presidency, when his ambassadors coined expressions like "the theatre of the absurd" and "the tyranny of the majority" to describe GA positions. In an attempt to alter the democratic "one nation, one vote" proceedings, Washington requested that voting rights should reflect proportional financial contributions. And since the collective contributions of some 107 countries of the South only covered two per cent of the organisation's annual budget, the administration evidently aimed to suppress dissenting Third World voices by denying them the vote. The US request did not go through, but Washington exerted considerable economic pressure by withholding accumulated debt payments and reducing its annual contributions from 25 per cent to 20 per cent.

Despite such pressures, the scheme did not succeed — at the time. During the '70s and '80s, the political weight of the USSR held the US in check. Consequently, the GA passed numerous resolutions condemning Israeli and American acts of aggression, such as the 1982 Israeli war against Lebanon, the 1983 US occupation of Grenada, the 1984 economic blockade of Nicaragua, the 1986 bombing of Libya and the 1989 invasion of Panama. When the American administration refused to grant Yasser Arafat an entry visa to attend a GA special meeting in November 1988, the assembly overruled the US and convened an extraordinary session in Geneva to hear the Palestinian leader, who had just announced the creation of a state in exile.

Yet the tide of such defiance was soon to turn. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the progressive indebtedness and consequent dependence of governments in the South, the period of challenging the North ended. Washington's "new world order" of the '90s included a strategy for "multilateral interventions", i.e. military action sanctioned and financed by the UN against hostile nations in the South, threatening US international interests. Thus, the UN heeded the Bush administration's directives and authorised the allied armies — of more than 30 countries — to force Iraq's retreat from Kuwait "by all means necessary".

Underlying the newly coined "multilateralism" is a convenient "unilateral" strategy, wrote Brent Scowcroft and Arnold Kanter, two prominent former members of the Bush administration. "Unilateralism" implies that America uses the ostensibly legitimate UN multinational military umbrella for its own strategic needs, without necessarily responding in kind. They explained: "The US will take care of the world when it must, but only in its way and according to its own *agenda and terms*." Consequently the US "took care" of oil-rich Kuwait — under the UN banner — by dropping 300 tonnes of depleted uranium on the Iraqi people, but vetoed military aid to the Bosnian Muslims for the third year in a row. After all, there is no oil to defend in former Yugoslavia — only a besieged and embattled people.

Fathi



De Gaulle's bomb rearmed

France has 500 nuclear warheads and 75 per cent of its electricity is provided by atomic energy. Diaa Rashwan looks at why President Chirac wants to expand the French nuclear programme even further

President Jacques Chirac's announcement that France would resume nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean sparked angry reactions throughout the world. And, coming little over a month after Chirac took up residence at the Elysée Palace, the announcement also led to speculation as to the reasons behind his decision.

Chirac's action cannot be seen in isolation from the legacy of former President Charles de Gaulle. The former mayor of Paris is the acknowledged leader of the trend rooted in De Gaulle's political philosophy. In effect, Chirac was elected president on 7 May on the basis of his repeated declaration of commitment to Gaullist principles and his will to develop them to keep pace with a changing world.

De Gaulle was the true father of France's nuclear bomb, although nuclear research and development began during the Fourth Republic in the early 1950s. On 13 February 1960, France exploded its first nuclear bomb in the Algerian desert and initiated a new nuclear weapons' strategy which was radically different from what the leaders of the Fourth Republic had been proposing.

At the start of the Cold War, the leaders of the time saw the French bomb as no more than a component of the American nuclear strategy. Its *raison d'être* was to confront any nuclear threat against Europe from the former Soviet Union. The leaders of the Fourth Republic did not conceive of any political role for their weapon other than keeping the country on a par with its traditional rival and ally in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Great Britain.

For De Gaulle the bomb had two basic roles: one military, the other political. He believed that the American nuclear arsenal was not capable of defending Europe in the event of a Soviet nuclear threat and that the American administration could not be counted on to take action at the appropriate time.

In political terms, France's possession of a nuclear bomb helped boost its position within NATO in relation to the United States, which was a more powerful military and political force. The bomb also elevated France's standing in Europe in relation to its economically stronger ally, West Germany. Above all, it was a strong sign of the independence of French foreign policy from its Western allies, in particular the US.

Despite the disappearance of the Soviet nuclear threat, Chirac's position on his nuclear arsenal is not a great deal different from De Gaulle's. The most effective role for France's nuclear capability now is political, especially in view of US supremacy in the world arena after the Gulf War and Germany's remarkable recent economic development.

De Gaulle's rule, which ended in 1968, witnessed only 30 nuclear explosions. The largest number of nuclear tests — 86 explosions — occurred between 1981 and 1992, under the Socialist administration of François Mitterand. During the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who belonged to the centre right, there were 55 explosions, while Gaullist President Georges Pompidou presided over the smallest number of explosions — only 21. Worldwide, France has conducted the third largest number of explosions, after the US (1,030 explosions) and the ex-Soviet Union (715).

Another factor said to have influenced Chirac's decision is the "nuclear lobby". There are three official organisations which play a key role in nuclear strategic decision-making: the French military staff command, the Atomic Energy Board (CEA), especially its Military Applications Department (DAM); and the General Commission for Armament (DGA). In addition to these state bodies, there are giant private-sector companies working in the field of nuclear armament, the most prominent being Aérospatiale.

An elite of generals and businessmen belong to these organisations, leading some to speak of an "industrial-military lobby" which has pressured Chirac into revoking Mitterand's decision to halt nuclear tests. Some experts on nuclear affairs, however, deny the existence of this lobby and argue that the state not only controls the three organisations mentioned above but also enjoys considerable influence on the management boards of the private arms companies.

The industry itself, in both the military and energy sectors, may have contributed to Chirac's decision. In the wake of the domestic and international campaign against the resumption of nuclear testing, the president was forced to announce some of the "technical" reasons for his decision in a meeting with the senate on 12 July. According to him, the recent explosions were, on the one hand, designed to test various nuclear warheads but, more importantly, to develop a method of carrying out computer-simulated nuclear explosions — a field in which France lags behind the US and Britain.

The civil nuclear energy industry has also made significant technological advances since France decided to develop nuclear power after the oil embargo which followed the October 1973 War. Over the past 20 years, the state treasury has forked out 800 billion francs to fund nuclear power stations which provide the country with 75 per cent of its electricity; France currently uses more nuclear power than any other nation in the world.

Politically, France has been plagued by an inferiority complex in relation to the US, especially since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall has allowed America to perch at the top of the "new world order" championed by former President George Bush. Just across the Mediterranean from France, in the Middle East, traditionally an area of French interest, it is the US which has been making an impact. Iraq was driven out of Kuwait by an allied force under American leadership, and political mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict has been spearheaded by Washington. France, and Europe in general, have hardly figured in the picture.

Similarly, France is also concerned that it has been unable to keep up with Germany's economic growth rate. Since De Gaulle, French leaders have striven to give Paris a leading role in a united Europe. Currently, however, the country's economy is in a shaky condition and faces unequal competition from Germany, its neighbouring economic giant, which has managed to extend its influence over the continent — especially in the Eastern European countries.

Chirac's response to this loss of power has been to offer its *force de frappe* (strike force) — a euphemism for France's nuclear capability — as a weapon to defend European interests and territory. Under pressure from those opposing test resumption, Chirac unequivocally explained this European role for France's nuclear force, singling out Germany as a potential beneficiary, since it was banned from developing a nuclear arsenal after World War II.

The reliance on nuclear capability seems to represent the cornerstone of Chirac's vision of entering the 21st century. Resorting to new tests allows France to use its 500 nuclear warheads to strengthen its international position, while promoting scientific development. Moreover, the return to the nuclear option, at a time when the US is trying to decrease the world's nuclear stockpile and prevent other nations from acquiring one, fits in well with the Gaullist principle that foreign policy decisions should remain independent of Washington.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Sell-out of the century

Just ask Senator Bob Dole how to win votes at election time. The answer, based on his actions, is at someone else's expense.

After taking a beating in pre-election polls due to moderate views not shared by many in a party of die-hard conservatives, Dole has pushed through Congress a foolhardy bill moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem on 31 May 1999. In so doing he has won the approval of Israel and, he hopes, the Jewish-American lobby. But at what price?

Forget for one moment that the status of Jerusalem is a burning issue on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating table. Forget that the US, for more than 15 years has patted itself on the back for being a key mediator in the Arab-Israeli peace efforts, and hopes to play an integral role in any future agreements. Forget that this bill makes American policy makers look like pawns on AIPAC's chess board. And then forget logic.

In the over 200 year-old battle between the legislative and executive branches of US government, Congress has repeatedly sought to carve for itself a larger niche in foreign policy decision-making. By approving this bill, they have placed President Clinton between a rock and a hard place while simultaneously undermining, in the international forum, the legitimate claims of the Arab and Muslim world to Jerusalem. And yet they expect the peace process to flourish and prosper.

Clinton has asserted that without modification, the bill would have been vetoed. But given his current standing, the two-thirds majority needed to override his veto is virtually assured. Nonetheless, it's the thought that counts.

In the realm of international politics, however, there is little room for cynicism, and credit should be given where it is due. The US has, and will continue to play a significant role in brokering an Arab-Israeli peace agreement. It does not matter if their agenda hinges on the continued implementation of sustainable development and preventive diplomacy versus peace for the sake of peace. What counts is that AIPAC and Israel are happy, US national security interests are accounted for and that Dole and other legislators gain re-election.

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovsky Pr Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 230 2879; Fax: 230 2879 Telex:413467 Kalilsu

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd. West Suite 2440. Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, 3rd Fl., 107-111 Fleet Str, London, EC 4; Tel: (01) 583 0692; Telex: 926011 Al-Ahram G; Fax: (01) 583 0744.

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue de Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Abdou Moubasher, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Sameh Abdallah, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mansour Abul-Azm, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Banti, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Annual Subscription Rates

Egypt........LE26.00
Arab Countries........$60.00
Other Countries........$150.00

Send your subscription order to:
Al-Ahram Subscriptions Department,
Al-Galaa St. Cairo, Egypt.
Subscription payments can be made directly in cash or by cheque to the same address.

Name........

Mailing Address........

Newsstand Rates Overseas

Australia	$4.0	Lebanon	1000 Liras
Austria	Sch 25	Malta	55 Cents
Bahrain	400 F	Morocco	5.0 Dirhams
Canada	$2.5	Muscat	400 Pesa
Cyprus	75 Cents	Qatar	4.0 Riyals
Denmark	12 Krone	Saudi Arabia	4.0 Rials
France	8 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
Germany	DM3.0	Switzerland	S.F.2.0
Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
Holland	F12.50	Tunisia	800Mils
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL35000
Italy	IL2800	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals

Projects in conflict

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the new Mediterranean map in the light of the Amman conference held this week and the coming Barcelona conference at the end of the month

Three international community projects are crowding the Mediterranean basin. On the surface they represent attempts to create large multinational cooperative affiliations. Below the surface lie deep seated rivalries with universal implications.

Firstly, we have the Middle East project, put forward by the Rabin government and the subject of a book by Peres. It has the strong support of the Clinton administration and the economic summit in Amman was convened this week to launch it.

Secondly, there is the Mediterranean project. Intended primarily to bridge the gap between the Arab countries bordering the Mediterranean to the south and the European countries bordering it to the north, it seeks to prevent the "clash of cultures" so frequently seen in the past across this sea. Israel is also included in the project. Originally the initiative of the European Union, it appears to be a response to Washington's determination to decide the course of events in the Middle East, particularly after excluding the UN and the Europeans from any effective say in the "peace process." The Mediterranean project is due to be inaugurated in the Barcelona conference scheduled for the end of this month.

The third project which is acquiring momentum in inverse proportion to the crisis of Pan-Arabism, so vividly illustrated by the present impotence of the Arab League, is the "Islamist" project.

All three projects have ramifications reaching far beyond the borders they encompass. Whereas the first two reflect a considerable degree of rivalry among the poles of power in the North, notably between the European Union and the US, the third is a tangible demonstration that the confrontation between North and South still continues. The world of Islam has become the symbol of the "South", even in the very heart of the US, as demonstrated by the recent Million Man March in Washington, led by Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the "Nation of Islam".

According to a US State Department document, Washington is keen to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a quick resolution to guarantee the uninterrupted flow of petroleum, the elimination of religious fundamentalist extremists and the promotion of American investment opportunities in the Middle East.

Although these are the main reasons for sponsoring the Amman summit, the US is also keen to maintain Israel's military and economic superiority, as America's main ally in the Middle East. It wants to bring Egypt, Israel and Jordan together as the three mainstays of a central regional axis to confront the growing threat from Iran, to create a security league between the Gulf states and to bolster relations between that league and the central axis countries. It further wants to ascertain that Iraq is firmly isolated and contained until Saddam Hussein is overthrown. Finally, by doubling its efforts, it hopes to reach a settlement between Syria and Israel and to bring Syria into the central axis. The document made no attempt to conceal Washington's ambition to exclude an influential role for Europe, nor its view that Iran, Sudan, Iraq and Libya are hostile countries that harbour terrorism and must be opposed.

It is interesting to note that the man who conceived the "dual containment" policy of Iran and Iraq, notwithstanding their mutual antagonism, is Martin Indik, the current US ambassador in Israel. No ordinary ambassador, Indik is America's first Jewish ambassador to Israel. Moreover, he has only been naturalised as an American citizen relatively recently, having originally come from Australia. He is now one of Clinton's closest associates in deciding the administration's Middle East policy.

On 22 September, Indik published an article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, in which he discussed the Clinton administration's policy toward the future of Israel, the Middle East in general and preparations for the Amman conference. Shortly before that, he had made a short trip to the US to "sell Israel", as he put it. In a series of meetings with American businessmen, he tried to convince them that it was their duty to encourage business with Israel, even if that country offered a very limited market compared to the much more promising markets in China, India and South East Asia. Indik mentions in his article that American businessmen were surprised to learn that Israel's GNP was $80 billion and that its annual economic growth rate was 8 per cent. What really drew their attention, he adds, were the potential opportunities Israel had to offer as "the gateway to the Middle East" located at the crossroads of trade and communications between European and Middle Eastern markets. Even if Israel has a market of only five million people, it can still play a pivotal role across the board in the region. The Middle East as a whole offers a potential market of 300 million people, a worthy rival to the markets of the Far East.

Indik then points out that, at the very time American businessmen began to realise the potential a Middle East market might present, business circles in Israel started to voice reservations about opening on to Arab markets, in the belief that Israel's interests would be better served by the newly opened markets of the Far East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. Indik finds this view shortsighted, and believes Israeli businessmen should operate in the two directions simultaneously, that is, take advantage of investment opportunities in the newly opened markets of the Far East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe while laying the foundations of trade relations with the Arab world. Indik claims that Israel has considerable advantages to offer the region in the fields of advanced technology, mechanised agriculture, water conservation, electronics, etc. A centre for ancient and modern history, it is also in a strong position to attract tourism to the area.

Contrary to Israeli assertions that they do not want to dominate the region, Indik goes on to say that Israel is capable of eliminating infrastructural disparities in the region, and of launching the economic takeoff of the region as a whole, provided it stood at the heart of the undertaking.

Where does Egypt stand on the question of a Middle East project described by the US ambassador to Israel as consecrating Israel's central position in the region? In the context of the peace process, Egypt can hardly boycott the project, not least because a boycott would only isolate Egypt, not Israel. But Egypt could still take advantage of the conflicting interests between the US and the European Union, and also play an effective role in the Barcelona conference. At least the Middle East project will not have the final say in the Mediterranean.

But peace will not take root around the Mediterranean if Egypt only tries to play the northern poles of power against each other. It must also address the more vital "North-South" issue. If Egypt does not work to link peace with mending the cracks in the Arab ranks and reviving the Pan-Arab national project , the Mediterranean basin will indeed succumb to a "clash of civilisations" between an Islamist project and a Judeo/Christian project, whether we call it "Middle Eastern" or "Mediterranean", with all the violence this will bring.

A move for the worse

By Naguib Mahfouz

I was deeply saddened by the US Congress's decision to transfer the American embassy to Jerusalem by the year 1999. Already the march of peace is floundering, and the last thing it needs are the additional hurdles that this decision has placed in its path. The US has been playing the role of peace broker in the Middle East, but it seems now that Congress has decided to enter the fray as a party to the conflict, on the Israeli side.

It would have been much better to leave the question of Jerusalem open to negotiations between Israel on the one hand and Arabs and Muslims on the other, and for the rest of the world to stand by and let the real protagonists come to a decision on its future status. But now that the US Congress has taken this step, it is incumbent upon Arabs, Muslims and concerned Christians to register strong protests before the United Nations, setting an example for other states that might otherwise be tempted to follow the example of the US Congress.

For its part, the UN should disregard the American Congressional decision and reaffirm that the status of Jerusalem is an international question to be resolved through special negotiations, before the conclusion of which no state has the right to act unilaterally.

There is little solace in the fact that Congress has postponed the implementation of its decision for three years, during which negotiations over the status of the city will have taken place. The decision appears to anticipate, before the fact, the results of the negotiations.

Another important aspect of this decision is the weight within the US of the Arab and Muslim American community. The Congressional decision clearly reflects the power of the Jewish lobby and the Jewish vote, but where are the Arab and Muslim lobbies and votes? True, the Arab community in the US has shown greater activism in the past few years, but they remain unable to affect the decision making process. It is time that they reassessed their situation within American society and better explored their untapped potential. They should also forge stronger links with American Muslims, who have become a considerable force during past years.

I find, nevertheless, that I must conclude by expressing my appreciation for President Bill Clinton's stance, in declaring his opposition to the decision as an obstacle in the way of Middle East peace.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

Not so common market

The Middle East Market is being tailored to underwrite Israel's regional hegemony, argues **Fawzy Mansour**

The so-called "Middle East Common Market", which has in past months been the subject of intense debate throughout the Arab world, is little more than an Israeli myth, propagated to obfuscate the real "Middle East Project", currently under implementation in the region.

Should Arab states accept or reject this project? Should they participate in it before the conclusion of the peace process or make their participation conditional on establishing a permanent, comprehensive and just peace? Does the Middle Eastern Project run counter to the Pan-Arab national project, or can they complement one another? These are some of the issues that have been the subject of fierce debate. Meanwhile, real life speeds ahead, rendering such debates virtually obsolete.

Developments, substantiated and supported by official American, Israeli and Arab positions and documents, indicate that the Middle East Project is not a proposal tabled for debate, approval or rejection. It is an elaborate plan, long gestating in US and Israeli corridors of power; one that has, furthermore, already been tacitly accepted by a number of Arab decision makers.

Nor is it the intention that the implementation of the Middle East project be contingent on the establishing of peace, however just or unjust, comprehensive or partial.

Initially it appeared as if implementation of the Middle East Project would progress hand-in-hand with the peace process — the realisation of a portion of the one concomitant with the realisation of a portion of the other. The Madrid formula twin-parallel tracks appeared to confirm this impression. Yet official Israeli statements, including documents presented at the Casablanca summit, have made it apparent that implementation of the Middle East Project constitutes for Israel not only a condition for peace, not only a guarantee of the permanence of that peace, but is, in fact, the real content of Hebraic peace.

From a historical perspective, this project is not a product of global change or the new world order, as is repeatedly claimed. Rather, it is a continuation of attempts to smother those projects of Arab renaissance that began with Mohamed Ali and reached their zenith with Gamal Abdel-Nasser. The Middle East Project can thus be seen as a natural extension of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In fact, it is the final stage in the construction of a Greater Israel, an Israel that dominates its region.

This project is being imposed on the Arabs at a unique historical juncture, at a time of unprecedented Arab vulnerability. It aims at imposing a final and immutable settlement on the Arab-Israeli conflict, a settlement fully in the interests of Israel and the gigantic forces backing it and at the expense not only of the future of the Arabs but of their existence as a coherent entity. Once this fact is accepted, it must also be accepted that the negative aspects of the project can hardly be ameliorated by tinkering with details. The most Arab negotiators can hope to do, and even this will require all the determination and skill that can be mustered, is to change a few appellations, orders of priority, timetables and other similar details, none of which have any bearing on the true nature of the project.

The Middle East Project, its mechanisms and short-term effects, must be examined much more closely than has hitherto been the case. But such an examination requires first that we dispense with the misnomer Middle East Market, under which the project is currently being marketed. Israel is notorious for its recourse to terms with positive connotations which shroud negative realities. Attempts to establish a monopoly on power and to consolidate its regional hegemony have long been cloaked by Israel in the vocabularies of security and peace. The concept of a Middle East Market was floated deliberately by the Israelis to foster Arab illusions that Israel is seeking their participation in something similar to the European Union. The suggestion is that to jump on the Middle Eastern bandwagon is to stay abreast of the times, to tune into a new world system characterised by regional blocs.

Israel, however, has not the slightest intention of accepting the fundamental bases of a common market. It may be happy to see the free flow of goods and services within the region, but it cannot possibly countenance that even more basic premise of "common markets": the free flow and equal treatment of capital and labour. It is inconceivable that Israel, whose closed economy corresponds to the racialist and exclusivist nature of the Zionist state, will accept, in the near or distant future, arrangements that would give Arab labour and capital free access to the Israeli market, and on terms equal to those of Israeli labour and capital.

In addition to disguising a quite different reality, the concept of a common market serves other Israeli interests. It justifies Israel's constant reference, in official and unofficial pronouncements, to the notion of "common resources" which are "the common property of the region's inhabitants [to be] used in their common interest". Such a notion clearly establishes a theoretical right for Israel to intervene in the way Arabs dispose of their own resources and to claim a share in the exploitation of those resources. But nowhere does the concept of a common market imply a "common ownership of resources", as suggested by Israel. Arab apologists for Middle Easternism, unsurprisingly, have remained silent on this point.

Middle Easternism, then, is a project with a very special nature, one that is as far as can be from the concept of a common market. It is a highly selective and extremely thorough project which seeks to allocate individual Arab countries specific roles in the service of an overall regional design — roles which vary according to the country's geographical proximity to Israel, their population, resources and economic weight. As such, the project is pragmatic in the extreme, using exceedingly disparate mechanisms, ranging from strict planning to market forces, and including a wide range of integrative procedures. Supported by international and regional financial and non-financial institutions, dominated by Israel and its supporters, the project is ultimately underwritten by Israel's military superiority over its neighbours. On this level, it is no different from any other socio-economic organisation based on domination and exploitation.

A careful study of available Israeli documents, including Shimon Peres' book *A New Middle East*, the Israeli document presented at the Casablanca conference and the scientific studies and papers on which both the book and the document draw, reveals the four cornerstones on which the project rests.

A complex of regional infrastructural networks have been carefully designed to ensure that Israel is established as the nerve centre of all regional economic activity. What is being constructed is, in effect, a one-way street since, once these networks are set up, any Arab country seeking to opt out will find the costs prohibitive. This infrastructural complex will include road, rail and communication networks, open sea ports and joint airports, oil, natural gas and water networks, joint water desalination plants, and a regional information network, which is bound to serve the Project and establish various links and connections between its headquarters in Israel and its peripheries.

Various plans to promote economic integration are being tailored to fit predetermined ends. Thus, integration projects between Israel, Jordan and those parts of Palestine which will be restored to the PLO leadership, often referred to as the Benelux option, constitute an attempt to subjugate the Palestinian and Jordanian economies to that of Israel. Integration in this case takes on a pattern similar to that of a free trade zone, but one deformed by the massive imbalances in the relative economic and political strengths of the participants. It is distinct also in the way it combines Israeli-imposed planning on the one hand, and the operation of market forces on the other. By fully incorporating the Palestinian and the Jordanian economies into the Israeli economy, the so-called Benelux option is designed to act as a kind of Arabised bridge, granting Israel access to the rest of the Arab world, particularly the Arab economies of the Gulf.

A second type of integration project is intended for Israel's borders with its Arab neighbours. Examples of such projects include the joint free port of Eilat and Aqaba and the Red Sea Riviera project, which is to stretch from Ras Mohamed on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula to the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, covering areas in Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

More indicative of the nature of this second type of integration is the proposal to establish a zone called "Jordan and Hermon land", which would include northern parts of Jordan and Israel and southern parts of Syria and Lebanon. These territories are to be devolved from their national economies and merged into "a unified economic entity under a common administration". One obvious aim of such a project is to side-step the problem of restoring the Golan and occupied south Lebanon to their rightful owners. It would ensure that Israel continues to administer these territories, their water and other resources, under a new name and with the intention of fulfilling greater ambitions. Ultimately, this project is aimed at establishing an economic and industrial centre incorporating the four countries directly involved and an outer periphery made up of the Gulf states, Egypt and possibly Iraq, which are to act as reserved markets for the central zone.

The aim of such integration, at least as far as Israel's border regions are concerned, is to restore Israeli control over territories that it once occupied or currently occupies. Direct economic and material control is to replace military occupation, thus guaranteeing the continued exploitation of these territories' resources in a more stable and secure manner than could be achieved under military occupation.

A third type of integration assumes a functional form. Here the different stages of production of a particular commodity or service, or of a group of similar products or services, are divided among regional states whereby Arab countries specialise in the initial stages of production dependent on local raw materials, cheap and under-skilled labour or primitive or simple technology while Israel specialises in the final stages of production characterised by more skilled labour and more advanced technology. Annexed to these later stages are the functions of top management, planning and, occasionally, financing, as well as packaging, insurance, transportation and marketing. Examples of this form of integration would be for Egypt to produce fruits which are then marketed by Israel, or to produce yarn and cloth which Israel will then finish and market.

It is well known that the primary stages in this type of functional division of labour — whatever their costs in real terms — receive only a minimal fraction of the full value of the final commodity or service. The lion's share is invariably allocated to the later stages. Moreover, the party closest to the marketing stage exercises control over those engaged in primary production. So, in the end, what these types of integration projects seek to do is replicate the structures of colonial production and copy the pattern of division of labour that exists between developed and underdeveloped nations.

It requires a vested interest — or a great deal of ignorance — to belittle the huge gap between the technologically and organisationally advanced Israeli economy — whatever its shortcomings — and the underdeveloped Arab economies. Whenever such a gap exists, the unconditional and blind operation of market forces works to deepen polarisation between the developed and underdeveloped. Strangely enough, or perhaps not so strangely, market forces are strongly assisted by American-backed planning mechanisms designed to offset the imbalance in resources between Israel and its Arab neighbours and to make the Arab resources work in the service of Israel.

The fourth plank of the Middle East project involves the setting up of an integrated grouping of joint regional institutions. This grouping, in which Israel and its non-regional friends will have the upper hand, will be charged with overseeing the implementation of the Middle East Project, speeding up the process of implementation and providing its necessary prerequisites. These, in other words, are the institutions of regional custodianship. As outlined in the Casablanca Declaration, they will include a regional tourism bureau, a regional chamber of commerce, a private sector businessman's council, a steering committee made up of government representatives and a subordinate executive secretariat assisting the steering committee.

Most important of all the proposed institutions is the regional development bank for the Middle East and North Africa, which, according to the Casablanca Declaration, will include "appropriate bodies charged with enhancing the dialogue around economic reform, regional cooperation, technical assistance and long-term economic planning". But, the declaration stipulates, the bank's most important task will be to provide the necessary financing for "ambitious regional infrastructure projects".

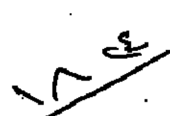
While Israel is to be the main — and, more often than not, the sole — beneficiary of these projects, it will need to shoulder only a small fraction of their cost. For instance, Israel is to bear less than 2 per cent of the cost of the 8,400km road around the Mediterranean, connecting east and western Europe with the Middle East and North Africa. Though Israel will benefit most, strategically, politically and economically, from the road, it is the Arab countries and Turkey that are to bear the bulk of the cost. And this pattern will be repeated with other infrastructural projects.

Economic integration projects of various types interconnected with a regional infrastructural network, and with market forces and Israeli determined planning mechanisms acting as the locomotive, constitute, in the words of a prominent Egyptian economist, the means by which Israel intends to spread its settlement programme throughout the Arab world. Similar to the settlements in pre-1948 Palestine, they will be equipped with material and economic communication networks, with local — economic — militias to guard them, and with propaganda and cultural brigades to justify them — only this time, both militias and brigades will be composed of a very small minority of Arabs acting in the service of the new hegemonical power. The vast majority of Arabs will be the victims of the new regime and its allies. They will not take it lying down.

An Israeli peace is currently being imposed on the Arab world from outside its borders. As such, it is an extension, by other means, of Western and Zionist wars against the Arab people and against their right to independent development. It combines, in novel forms appropriate to the age, elements of settler colonialism, traditional colonialism and neocolonialism, and will only result in a further polarisation between wealth, income and technology on one side and poverty, unemployment and the waste of human resources on the other.

This microcosm of the World Economic System to which it belongs, with its double negative impact of global and regional domination and exploitation, is bound to create powerful social forces which, seeing that they are deprived of the just and equal peace for which they yearned and are given instead the sham Pax Hebraica which blocks their road to independent, sustained and human development, will find again their way to regaining mastery over their own destiny.

The writer is professor of political economy and former chairman of Ain Shams Middle Studies Centre.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Political — through and through

It is a truism that economic cooperation between two countries or groups of countries is conditioned by the extent to which they enjoy peaceful, neighbourly ties and mutual trust. It is equally evident that the success and longevity of such cooperation remains contingent on the benefits that accrue to all the concerned parties and on the ability of such cooperation to promote their respective interests.

The Amman meeting, however, has attempted to promote fully-fledged economic cooperation between the countries of the region without the necessary conditions of peace, and at a time when complex and as yet unresolved political problems still loom on the horizon. Amman, then, was the setting for a classic exercise in fudging, with immediate interests dominating the surface, with partially obscured but deep-seated contradictions and differences bubbling beneath the surface.

It should have come as no surprise, then, that the meeting was the scene of contentions that no single party had wanted to foreground. Such contentions reflected unresolved differences in Arab positions. Some parties are of the opinion that the time for economic action has come and that the region must now make up for lost time by encouraging a building and investment boom regardless of unresolved political issues. King Hussein, after concluding a solid base for bilateral cooperation with Israel, is one party to have arrived at such a conclusion. Others include those Arab states which have tended to insulate *themselves* from issues of regional and international significance, such as Qatar and Oman.

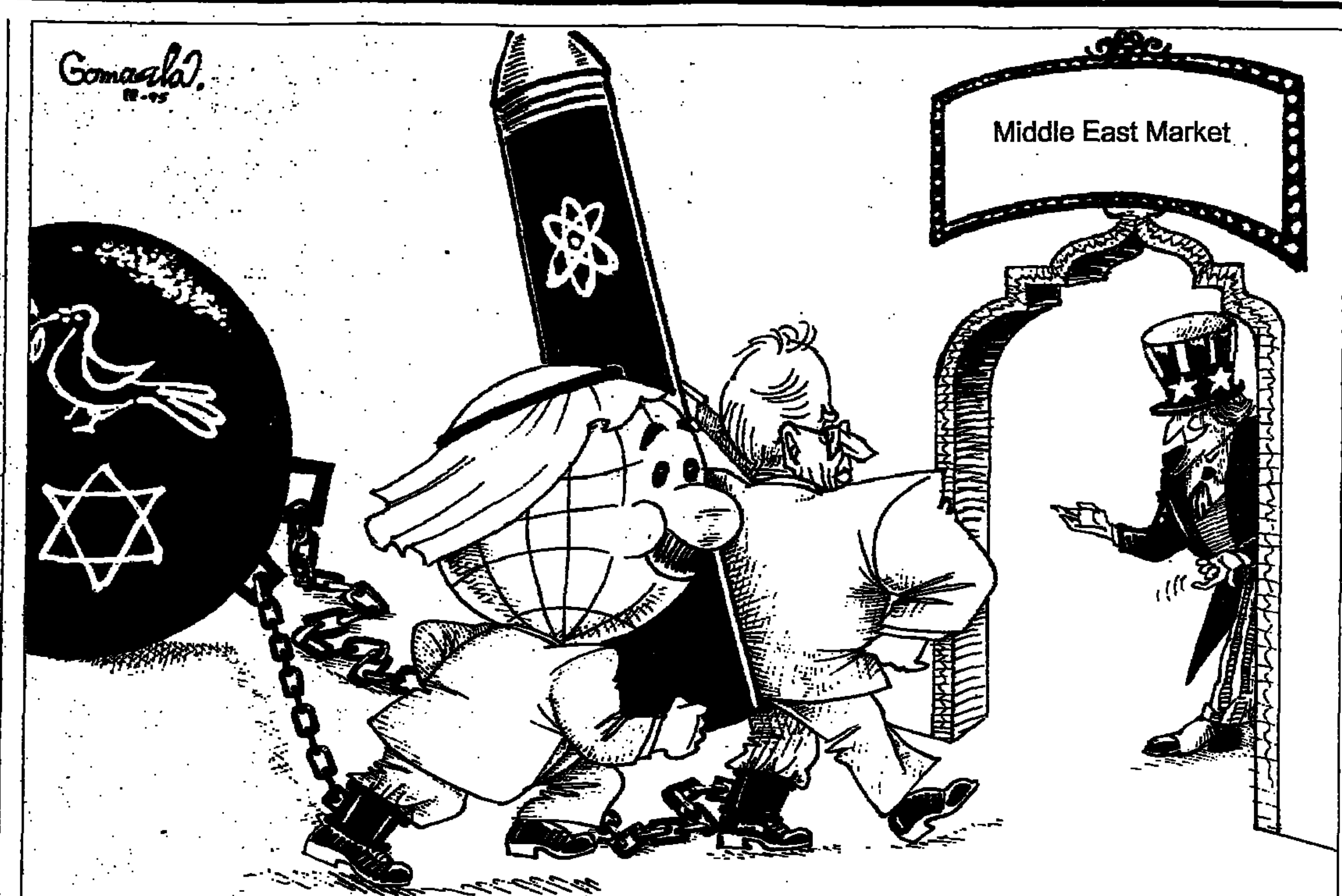
A second group considers economic cooperation to be merely the icing on the cake, a final touch to political cooperation. Those holding this position see economic cooperation progressing hand in hand with political progress. Full economic cooperation, from such a perspective, is inconceivable if one party continues to avoid implementing all the requirements for peace, continues to occupy Arab land, and continues to drag its feet over the implementation of *agreements already reached with* the Palestinians. This is the position adopted by Egypt and by other countries that have, historically, borne the brunt of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While these two Arab viewpoints do not differ so much in goals, they differ in approach and tactics, a difference on which both Israel and the US have been able to capitalise. Making economic cooperation dependent on political progress is in neither Israel's nor the US's interest, given that they wish to avoid any pressure being brought to bear on Israel vis-à-vis progress on the Syrian-Lebanese track, or awkward questions being asked about Israeli nuclear supremacy.

Being unaccustomed to bringing their differences into the open, points of divergence in Arab positions have remained beneath the surface. But the spark needed for them all to come bursting forth was provided by King Hussein, when he alluded to the Egyptian foreign minister's inadvertent mention of an Arab "rush". No person or state was singled out. Yet King Hussein was spurred to attack Egypt, and called on the meeting — by way of punishing Egypt rather than serving the common interest — to hold its next session in Qatar. At this point Egyptian foreign minister felt he had to clarify that which should have been unnecessary — that Egypt was not in competition with Jordan or Qatar.

It may be some time before regional economic cooperation takes shape in the Middle East. Despite mammoth projects promising an overflow of milk and honey for all the countries and peoples of the Middle East to enjoy, in reality the conference constituted little more than an assembly of financiers and businessmen from the region. It did, however, establish the institutional mechanisms for cooperation in the future, including a development bank, a council for regional tourism and a regional chamber of commerce.

The two most notable features of the meeting were the hastily concluded agreement between Israel and Qatar to construct a natural gas pipeline between the two countries — which would probably have been built if the Amman meeting had not gone ahead — and *Israel's blatant use* of the forum to state its position. Israel blamed Syria for the staggered peace talks, and complained of sluggish economic cooperation with Egypt. Peres *could not hide his* anger and contempt and blurted out, in a telling comment, that Israel's GDP exceeds any income that could be generated by cooperation with the Arabs. This statement *has unveiled Israel's real aims* behind economic cooperation, which are, of course, political through and through.



Soapbox

The beginning of the end

Three years ago the Ethiopian regime did the Sudanese government a great service by expelling Colonel John Garang's SPLA forces. The loss of bases in Ethiopia obliged the SPLA to withdraw from large areas it previously controlled.

The Sudanese government, ignoring Ethiopia's earlier favour, responded negatively to the request to extradite three men suspected of involvement in the assassination attempt on President Mubarak. It has subsequently offered military bases within Sudan's borders to Ethiopian resistance groups.

In response Ethiopia looks set to welcome the SPLA back onto Ethiopian territory.

If political opposition to the Turabi-Bashir government, as represented by the National Democratic Alliance, is only gradually feeling its way towards military confrontation against the regime, at least one of its members, Garang himself, has no such feelings of ambivalence. He has consistently advocated armed resistance to the Khartoum government which came to power in a military coup over 6 years ago.

The Sudanese regime is facing widespread opposition. Last November northern Sudan witnessed wide-scale protests against the regime. Several large cities were scene to violent demonstrations in which representatives of all sections of the population participated. These demonstrations lasted for several days, despite savagely punitive measures on the part of the security forces.

Given the precarious situation inside Sudan, and growing opposition across the board to the regime in Khartoum, the deterioration in Ethiopian/Sudanese relations could well be a watershed. The next twelve months, if they do not see the end of the Sudanese regime, almost certainly will mark the beginning of that end.



This week's Soapbox speaker is former Sudanese minister of national guidance.

Mahgoub Osman

The sun also sets

Empires tend to have trouble coming to terms with their own mortality. But, writes **Mohamed Hassanein Heikal**, in trying to recapture past or sliding glory, Britain, France and the US are wreaking havoc with the world order

Any student of the history of conflict knows that retreat is a much more difficult manoeuvre to execute than attack. Where attack depends for its success on many objective conditions, a successful retreat, whether from a vulnerable position or as a strategic option, requires great acumen in assessing a situation and boldness in dealing with the givens of that situation.

At the level of individuals, retreat is a fairly straightforward affair; for states, it is a complex manoeuvre interwoven with many factors, such as national pride, domestic pub*lic opinion, international standing, the* pressures brought by various institutions and special-interest groups on the decision-making process and, last but not least, the political climate at the national, regional and international levels.

Because of all these constraints, states are usually loath to embark on the manoeuvre of retreat. This is all the more true of great powers locked in an imperial mind-set, either because, like the United States, they find themselves suddenly thrust into an unchallenged position of global readership or because, like Britain and France, they are nostalgic for their days as colonial powers ruling over far-flung dominions. But it is a truism of history that the sun inevitably sets on any empire, however powerful, as new realities impose themselves on the old order, making it wiser *to retreat in timely and orderly fashion to a* more tenable position than to be driven back in disarray.

Let us look at the case of the US, which today stands at the pinnacle of world power, thanks in a large measure to two landmark events which have marked this century more than any other, the first being the allied victory in World War II, the second, the end of the Cold War following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Somehow the US took the credit for both events, ascribing the allied victory to its intervention in the war and depicting the collapse of the Soviet Union as an achievement for the US. In the case of its role in World War II, the US conveniently forgot both the time and space dimensions: time, because it was not until December 1941 that the US entered the war; space, *because it was actually* in the vast, unforgiving heartland of Russia that the first cracks began to appear in Hitler's formidable war machine.

As to its purported victory in the Cold War, the US again conveniently forgot two major factors which played a large role in the downfall of its rival superpower: one, that the Soviet experience carried within it the seeds of its own decomposition, and two, that Moscow's drive into the Third World often brought it into head-on collision with the forces of nationalism and/or religion. Having thus appropriated the two biggest victories of the century, as it were, the US developed an arrogant and instructive global stance that acquired dangerous proportions with its spectacular display of firepower in the Gulf War.

But conducting a limited war is very different from managing a new world order, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the US lacks the material and moral resources, as well as the experience, to embark on such an *ambitious project. So far, its performance* as the self-appointed guardian of global stability and human rights has been dismal, with more armed conflicts flaring up in different parts of the war than ever before, and a highly selective human rights agenda which has laid it open to charges of double standards on more than one occasion. Then there is its irresolute approach to the Bosnian crisis, which has placed severe strains on the Western allianee, and its ludicrous attempt to use the same strong-arm tactics with China, the largest country in the world, as it has done with small regional powers like Libya and Iraq.

Although opinion polls conducted in the post-Cold War era indicate that most Americans would like to see their country pay less attention to foreign policy issues and more to *domestic affairs, the US shows no sign of* retreating from its central position on the world stage. Its predominance leaves Britain and France relegated to supporting roles on a stage where they once played leading parts. The question is whether they are prepared to accept the final closure of the long imperial chapter in their history, or whether they think they can turn the clock back to a time when they still reigned supreme on the world stage.

If one specific event can be singled out as marking the final setting of the sun on the British and French empires, it would be the Suez War of 1956. Already greatly enfeebled by World War II, the last vestige of the imperial majesty was shattered by their ill-advised incursion into Egypt. Still, they had plenty to fall back on, for no one can deny *their greatness in terms of the major con*tributions they made to the common human heritage in the fields of literature, philosophy, politics, economics, science, art, and even warfare, contributions of which they can be justly proud. Less salubrious is the colonial chapter of their history — but that is another story.

Following the Suez debacle, neither the British nor the French had any choice but to execute the manoeuvre of retreat with as much grace as they could muster. For a while, it seemed they had managed to pull off a *successful* retreat, *despite* considerations of pride, image, public opinion and the pressures of institutions and interest groups. After a period of uncertainty and confusion things settled down, and it was thought the two empires had come to terms with the new realities of the age and that they had succeeded in putting the past behind them.

In this connection, I remember a conversation I had with former British Prime Min*ister Harold Wilson, when I called on him* at his office in the House of Commons soon after his government's famous decision to withdraw from its positions east of Suez. While conceding that Britain's days as a global military superpower were over, Wilson believed it could continue to play a leading cultural role worldwide. This was more or less the same way French President Charles De Gaulle defined his country's new international role.

During a meeting I had with the general at the Elysée Palace, he spoke at some length of the greatness of France without once alluding to its military might. When I reminded him of his insistence that France should retain an independent nuclear striking force, he replied that France should not allow herself to be left behind, the implication *being that nuclear technology and the pres*tige it bestows on those who master it were a prerequisite for her enduring greatness.

For several years, the manoeuvre of retreat was conducted from London and Paris with varying degrees of success, as the two once mighty empires sought to redefine their greatness in the absence of supreme military power. But a nostalgic longing to revive the imperial dreams of yore seems to have taken hold in the two capitals. For Britain, the turning point was probably the Falklands War, on which the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher embarked with a fervour reminiscent of the Crusades. She seemed determined to live up to her Iron Lady soubriquet, donning a military helmet to review the troops and brandishing a figurative sword as she dispatched the British Navy *to reclaim a remote outpost of the em*pire. The Falklands War is long over, and we are not concerned here with recapitulating its reasons and results; what does concern us is its impact on British politics, which seems once again to be driven by delusions of empire.

For its part, France had tried to resurrect its role as the colonial power in central Africa two years earlier, by sending a military force on a mission to depose Bokassa in the '70s. This was followed by covert meddling in Algeria, notably by the last socialist Inter*ior Minister Charles Pasqua, who dealt with* the former French colony in March the same way his predecessors had done when it was considered a territorial extension of France which just happened to lie across the Mediterranean. It was during his period in office that, for the first time since Algeria's independence former French settlers were encouraged to return to Algeria and reclaim their property. A more recent example of the imperial mood taking over in France was President Jacques Chirac's decision to resume under ground nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll last September in defiance of international public opinion and of the moratorium on testing adhered to by his predecessor, François Mitterrand, in April 1992, a decision which led to charges of "Napoleonic arrogance" by New Zealand's foreign minister and to violent protests throughout French Polensia.

And so the retreat from a position of might based on military power to the greatness of *which De Gaulle spoke ground to a halt.* Like a fading matinee idol will try to stage a comeback in the same theatre where he once enjoyed star billing, Britain and France are trying to resurrect their roles as imperial powers in their traditional spheres of influence. But time does not stand still, and they should avoid falling into a pattern of behaviour reminiscent of Sunset Boulevard, the tragedy of an aging film star trying to recapture her former glory.

The difference is that while the pathetic attempts by the play's heroine to reverse the *passage of time inspire only pity, the equally* futile attempts by one-time empires intent on recapturing their former glory elicit more complex reactions because, though doomed to failure, they can create unnecessary problems and complications.

For example, it is disquieting to see Britain and France now setting up a joint military command outside both NATO and the European Union. The inference to be drawn from this is that they see themselves as having special interests and playing a special role entailing a military force that is neither Atlantic nor European. When it came to the crunch, however, the alliance proved ineffectual, and Britain and France had to bow out and let the Americans take over. Still, the new Anglo-French military alliance is symptomatic of a return to the old imperial mindset, an alarming prospect not only for countries lying within the boundaries of their former *empires but for global stability at large.*

Also symptomatic of this trend were the V-J Day commemorations held in Britain to mark the 50th anniversary of victory over Japan. I happened to be in London at the time, and what struck me most about the celebrations, which were staged with all the pomp and pageantry for which the British are famous, was their strongly militaristic tone. The climax came on 19 August, with a 3-hour long parade of veterans before Buckingham Palace, the royal yacht Brittania sailing down the Thames at the center of a dazzling military display, which included a flypast of jets in formation spelling out the figure 50, and the largest fireworks show ever seen in Britain, as 20 tonnes of rockets lit up the skies of London. As I watched the extravaganza, I could not help feeling there *was something a little unreal about the whole* thing, when it suddenly came to me that Britain had never defeated Japan! On the contrary, it had taken the Japanese only a few weeks to drive the British out of their colonies in the Far East and, although Britain restored them after the war, it was not by military means.

By claiming a victory that was not in fact hers, Britain was indulging in a self-deceiving, if not self-defeating, exercise fueled by a longing to recapture its long-lost imperial grandeur.

As to the United States, the time has come for it to stop using a rhetoric of democracy and stability to justify its hegemonic, not to say imperial, approach to global affairs. It should also stop compromising the credibility of the United Nations by using the Se*curity Council as an instrument of US policy.* Ideally, the world should be managed by the collective will of its inhabitants in a responsible manner based on coordination rather than on conflicting interests and contradictory stands.

For the international organisation to truly represent this will, for it to become an effective agent for managing post-Cold War crises, the United States and its Western allies must exercise their strategic option to retreat from the present neo-imperial positions they are adopting into positions that are more in keeping with the spirit of the age.

The above article is this month's contribution by the writer to the column "Insights into the World," published by the Tokyo-based Daily Yomiuri *and syndicated to 240 newspapers in the US and South East Asia.*

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Celebrations of racism

The so-called Arab-Israeli peace process has hitherto won its protagonists two sets of Nobel peace prizes — one set for Begin and Sadat, and another for Rabin, Peres and Arafat. It is doubtful that any other international question has earned as many White House ceremonies; tear-jerking 'peace in our time' speeches; round the world, satellite-transmitted media coverage; media presenters, their voices cracking with emotion — discoursing on this or that 'historic day for peace'. Some widely publicised 'achievement' in the Middle East has been a prominent element of the electoral campaigns of every American president since Nixon. Already, the Palestinian-Israeli agreement has earned two White House-lawn ceremonies, and in view of the pace of that particular track of the peace process, we should probably expect quite a few more — entertainment for the next century.

It is interesting therefore that a political settlement immersed in so much high flown morality should have as its one true justification — the logic of *realpolitik*, of naked and brute force. Arafat and other apologists of the Oslo Accord can say little to refute the fact that the Palestinian-Israeli agreement establishes a system of apartheid on Palestinian land, even as that system is collapsing in South Africa; they cannot deny that the accord's very premise is one of blatant inequality.

They have, however, one apparently unstoppable argument: 'what other options are there?'

And I must admit that this is, and continues to be, a staggeringly effective argument. *Palestinians in the* West Bank, as their compatriots in Gaza before them, may have few illusions about what the Oslo Accord holds for them; but, confronted with the sealed door of options, the issue becomes one of choosing between an occupied town where Israeli soldiers can traipse at will, leaving dead and maimed children in their wake, or an apartheid-style 'township', where the Israeli soldiers stay on the outskirts.

Last week, the US Congress gave Palestinians and Arabs yet another resounding slap in the face. Arafat may confidently prophesy, a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital in two years time, but so far as America is concerned, Jerusalem will remain "the united and eternal capital of the Jewish state". Palestinians and Arabs are, of course, already venting the full range of outraged feelings. Dire warnings against "derailing the peace process" are being, and will continue to be, voiced — for a week, two weeks. Then what? Meaningless White House assurances will be found more or less satisfactory, one more Palestinian and Arab right will have been confirmed as flushed down the drain, and we're back to the immutable question: what other options are there?

There are two problems with this question however. The first, and obvious, one: when exactly is an oppressed people supposed to decide that the time has come to make a final choice, to acknowledge that the options of continuing struggle are a thing of the past and that the only available options are those of negotiated settlements? For *several years, and while in prison, apparently for the rest* of his days, Nelson Mandela had the option of renouncing violence, as a price for his release and subsequent negotiations for a settlement. He refused — repeatedly. Arafat's renunciation came from his comfortable headquarters in Tunis, not *in return for a similar renunciation* on Israel's part, but for the mere recognition of the PLO as a possible negotiating partner.

It is this kind of flagrant lopsidedness that characterises the essence of the Palestinian-Israeli accord, as Edward Said and other critics of the accord have amply dem*onstrated. It is widely recognised that equal rights are an* insufficient condition for justice — the million black men who flocked to Washington the other week had as much *right* as Clinton to be at the White House, yet few, if any, had similar access. But to speak of justice at all in the absence of equal rights can only be justified by barefaced racism.

And this brings us to the second aspect of the question of options. What if the realities of power — irrespective of Arafat's negotiating strategies or styles — make a just settlement of the Palestinian question impossible, now or in the foreseeable future? Does this mean that as Pal*estinians and Arabs we have no option but to ac*knowledge, swear to and proclaim undying loyalty to a settlement that legitimates, and celebrates, our consignment as racially and culturally inferior beings?

A just settlement means one of two options: two states on the land of historical Palestine with fully equal rights *of sovereignty — as for instance the right of the Pal*estinian state not only to establish as big an army as it desires, but to possess nuclear weapons, so long as Israel maintains its own armed forces and nuclear weapons. Or, one state with two peoples, with full equality in rights, including first and foremost the right of return for the millions of Palestinians who were pushed out of their land one or two generations ago, which, to say the least, is more *valid than the Jewish two-thousand-year-*old "right of return".

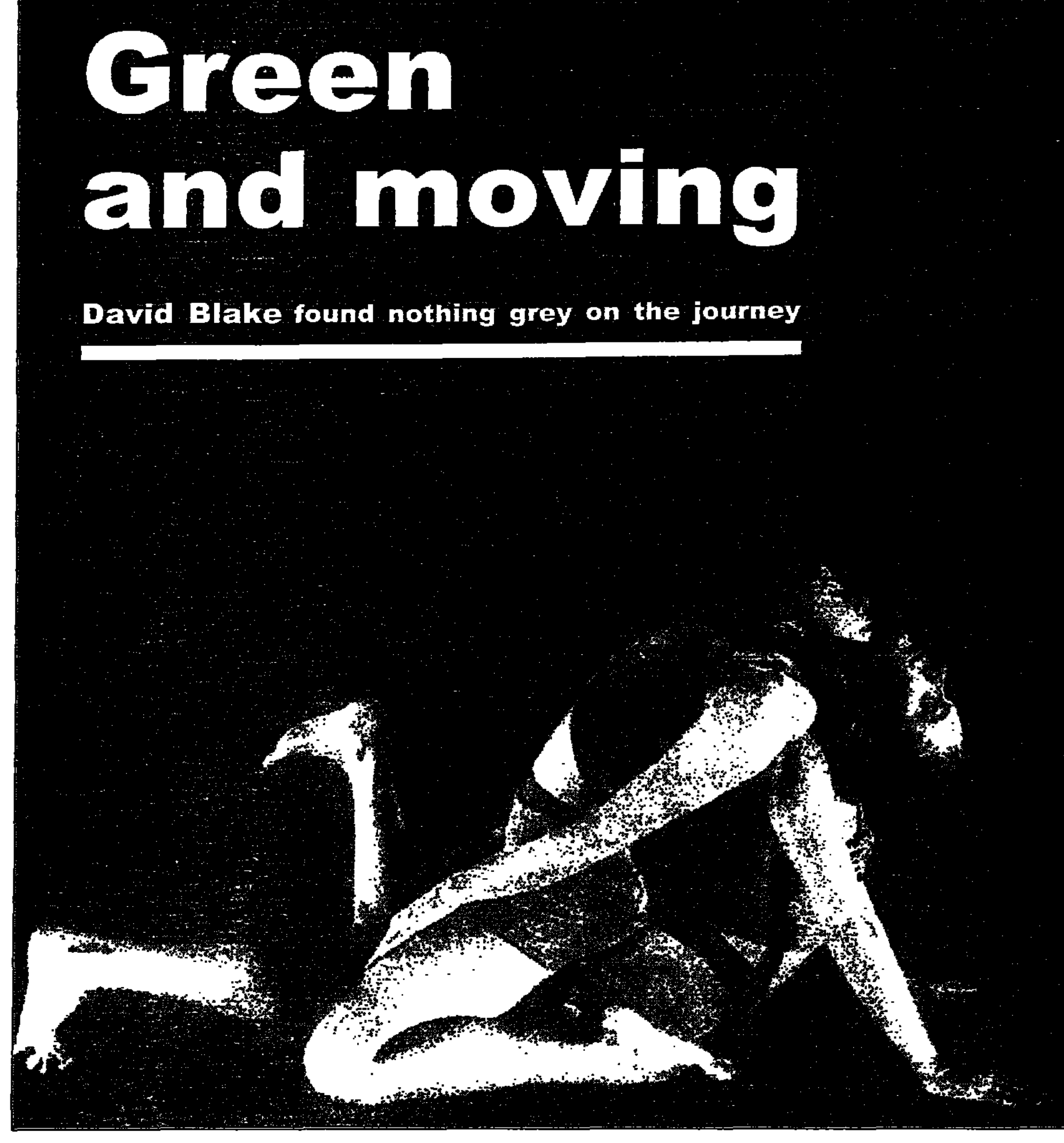
This is the bare minimum for a discourse of justice and morality. A discourse of *realpolitik* would tell us bluntly, however, that the realities of power today and in the near future deem such goals no more than pies in the sky. *But what this bluntness means in concrete terms is* that we cannot hope to win justice now or in the foreseeable future — not a very unique situation for oppressed people and groups throughout history, and one which never stopped them from continuing to seek justice, even though the seeking seemed at times un*bearably exhausting and the goal unachievable.*

It is the admixture of the two discourses that is so sinister. For the product is simply one of racist morality — Jewish blood, to use one Rabin's favourite expressions, is worth much more than Palestinian or Arab blood; Arab rights are irrelevant if they conflict with what are *deemed Jewish rights, to land, water, security, etc.* A few score recent Jewish immigrants in Hebron have more rights to the town than the thousands of Palestinians who have inhabited it for countless generations.

That world leaders, the world media and the Nobel *committee should find all this worthy of eulogising and* celebrating is mind-boggling. That we should be called upon to join in is a descent into the realm of the absurd.

Green and moving

David Blake found nothing grey on the journey



Movers: Movement Dance Theatre (Switzerland); Panta Rhei; Main Hall; Cairo Opera House; 24 October

Anything goes when everything flows. So said the Greek Heraclitus who knew everything about love, time and transience, the things this show is about.

Nothing can be contradictory when nothing is stated. Things are shown — and they move on and out. For example, this is a theatre in front of us with a stage. These are old things which get broken in the moving of time. Everything is being broken anyway. And this now is our now.

The Movers company move far and fast around the earth, not as characters in a ballet or opera but as matter, as human movers — or at least partly human, since they are also on the move out of their own species. This is fast-forward moving indeed, and exciting to watch.

This is a Swiss company; its director/choreographer is Bruno Steiner, and the show on offer — Panta Rhei — is a result of his collaboration with Catherine Christ. In it everything flows all over the place, timeless but evocative of things past and passing. Nothing classical. It goes in the other direction. Classical is a mechanism to make the physicality of dance safe to look at. It covers the awful effort with the gloss of form and discipline. Movers, on the contrary, let you in on what it is really like to move, though without the macho-hairy aspect of sport. There is no hair in Movers though there is plenty of flesh and muscle.

Physicality is always dangerous. Humans are dangerous objects. The other animals all know it. "Don't get too close" is the unwritten law of the jungle.

Movers is short on decor so there is plenty of space but not much light. It is a dark journey but the dark is never dense and you see very clearly what is going on. Plenty. They are in basic get-ups, the girls bra and bikini, the boys jock straps. It is nice to see the feet.

The show is in two acts. It moves rapidly. Alarm clocks go off; the listeners are up at 4.30 in the morning to catch a plane to nowhere, or else to watch Neanderthal man bring home the meat. The world on the stage is more or less the one in the streets. And we are not allowed to forget it. The Ice Age is just around the corner. It's really all quite bestial but never, thank goodness, is it ever really beastly. This is serious theatre and we are not allowed to forget the fact. Statements are made forcibly but out of tiny things : noises and dripping water. Bodies dart and then stay transfixed at alarmingly unbalanced angles. Next, a song, maybe Australian — Bendigo Baby — drifts about, sounding aboriginal. Then a group in cheesecloth and ashes. Crossovers between the contemporary and prehistoric.

Comes a circle of light mid-stage, dogs in no man's land. Beware — they look like the people in Francis Bacon paintings minus blood and gore. It is all far beyond sex, and no other relief is offered. All this and it is seldom, miraculously, heavy going. Movers has a light touch and a colour of its own that illuminates everything the dancers do. Burlesque, but without put down, is close. An Oscar figure of absurd monumentality is presented to something on a stretcher. Name your favorite star as recipient. But something factual is on that stretcher. It gets up and rides away on a girl's back.

There's a man on my back says the script — there's a man on everyone's back say the Movers. Move quick and perhaps he'll fall off. He does. It's harsh these days for humans says Movers and getting more expensive all the time. So drop in for the fast-food cannibal lunch. Small furry little animals are scratching holes in the icy desert sand in which to do their big job. Do do done. What it is to be human. Let's try something else.

Chasing after the things which most people make fun of and despise, they move off through the ruins of life to the sound of fresh bird calls.

Toru Takimitsu, Green for Orchestra; Beethoven, Concerto no 5, E flat for piano and orchestra, op 73; Ramzi Yassa, soloist; Gustav Mahler, Symphony no 1 D major (The Titan); Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 28 October

Green? There is so much green. The green of salad days and a mystical, eternal green.

This concert opened with a piece by Takimitsu. A curtain of light texture with clicks and clacks and neon bright lights darting over its surface — it was very Japanese and at the same time close to Karol Szymanowski's mandragora pantomime music of the twenties.

Its second section, which is really short, is the loveliest. Questions begin to flood in — but then it stops. More of Takimitsu would have been a bonus. The orchestra did it proud.

This same orchestra, not heard since before the *Aida* marathon, made a good companion to Ramzi Yassa's delivery of Beethoven's *Emperor* concerto. One must give up hoping he will play a more seldom heard piece from his repertoire. There was something celebratory about the way the pianist handled it. Yassa has a position — Egypt's best known musician abroad and her greatest soloist — and he offers splendid and generous proof of living up to this position.

Proud, almost haughty at the opening, Yassa was imperial in his absolute certainty of delivery in the first movement. You cannot handle a piano in this way if you are not the master. And he is. He lets you know it, too, and there is ample justification for obeisance. So it was imperial: an old and dangerous word even for Beethoven.

Yassa is splendid at statements. This is it — thus is it done. He is an unaffected person. He never presents himself but always the music. Enough that his playing constantly recalls the great because he belongs with them in his genuine simplicity and elemental directness. He is not a show off; he is the real thing. Nothing, for example, can dim a deep, rich piano tone; it's food for listening and sustains. He has no need to fear the years gone or to come. He improves with age.

And so the Emperor went on through its poetic trills and thrills. Small bays of sound opening out into oceanic seascapes. Yassa, in the middle of the first movement, struck gorgeous baritonal single notes, repeated in the left hand while the right ripples and shimmers up into the light. Everything was a joy to hear. And the orchestra? It rose, in its way, to honour the performance at the keyboard.

The *Emperor* always seems to be a one movement thing, so effortlessly do the tunes fly off each other. And the moody, recalcitrant piano obeyed like a proud beast, trotting and galloping through vernal heavenly spaces.

Spinning wheels of speed came at the end, sudden pull ups, and then on with the thrills to bring the concerto to its finish. Yassa had once again come — played — and conquered.

Hi-ho, you up there on the hill. More green, Mahler's favorite spring colour. His first symphony already showed the Mahler format which no one, except a supine Mahler lover, can accept without protest.

The orchestra's brass — not very clear or green in the opening, breathless and dusty (and no wonder given the speeds demanded by El-Saedi) — kept up. Parts of the first movement were autumnal rather than spring like but green came again and moved fast. The big, generous symphony from then on never faltered. What we hear in the Titan, of course, comes again in Mahler — landler, lederhosen heroes battling through darkness to light. This symphony is really an overture to the other nine Mahler symphonies.

El-Saedi is a romantic with pride. So his *Titan* strides about in two outfits : formal feet in the past and the uncoated, bare-chested forest ranger clearing a path to tomorrow. This works well for the symphonic machinery: it grew more interesting as it developed. The very long funeral scene was not for sinking. We rose up green and muscular to face another journey.

Theatre

In a word

Sarah Enani reviews the newly formed Rebellion Theatre Troupe's recent production of Peter Handke's *Kaspar* at the Goethe Institute

The Rebellion Theatre Troupe, with its core being actor-director Hany Ghanem, owes its inception to a workshop given at the Hanager Centre in 1994 by the German director Eos Schopohl, and financed by the Goethe Institute. Ms Schopohl trained the Egyptian participants in her workshop in what might best be described as a neo-Stanislavskian technique, in that it combined the traditionally required 'introspective' technique with a requirement for great physical control. However, the 'work-in-progress' show that resulted from this workshop, and which was shown rather prematurely to an audience, was not a great success. Ms Schopohl was hustled back to Germany, and everyone forgot the matter. Little did they know that this workshop had hatched the fledgling Rebellion Troupe.

Ordinarily Rebellion would have joined the ranks of what we now call the "free" theatre troupes; but the movement, once so energetic, has to all intents and purposes fizzled out, collapsing due to a terminal lack of momentum. Plans for a new Free Theatre Festival are vague; most of the original "free" troupes have either gone to the state-funded theatre, gone back to their day jobs or just gone to the dogs. The movement having gone up in smoke, these resourceful rebels turned to the Goethe Institute for funding and official framework. In addition, Goethe also provided very adequate performance space.

The play in question, *Kaspar*, is the most famous and critically acclaimed work of Austrian playwright Peter Handke. Handke, a contemporary of Pinter, Beckett, and other Absurdist playwrights, was intrigued by the "corrupting" effect of language on a person's consciousness and by the tendency, perceived by linguistic and literary theoreticians, of "socially determined" language "[to limit] creativity and individuality by instilling socially determined values, attitudes, and ... definitions which hinder independent thought." In many of his plays, Handke relied on what we now call "conventional" Absurdist techniques, rejecting the linear plot, dispensing with dialogue altogether, and so on.

Kaspar is based on a real-life incident — a wild "wolf-boy" found in Nuremberg in 1828. The play postulates a situation where the process of acquiring language actually kills the main character. Rebellion's adumbrated version gives us a somewhat idiosyncratic *Kaspar*. We see the wolf-boy in his inarticulate stage — Hani Ghanem does a superb job as the wild-eyed, tousled-haired Kaspar, trying to stand, trying to talk to objects, struggling with phrases he does not understand.

Throughout the play, as he develops a kind of awareness of meaning, he is assaulted by a battery of words, sentences and jumbled-up phrases, issued by, presumably, 'the voice of society'. In Arabic and German issued by a male and a female, most of these statements extol the virtues of language ("You have a sentence. With this sentence you can shape the world") or instill the morals of society (a stentorian voice shouts "You're not here to enjoy yourself!" just before a sexual-awakening scene done rather well: he masturbates lying face down on top of a grand piano, his knee crashing rhythmically down on the keys). After this, Kaspar leaves the stage for us to see video projections of war scenes, with the ironic counterpoint of the babble of self-righteous voices in the background. Kaspar then comes back on stage to face us, says "I ... am. G'night, all," in Arabic and leaves the stage, to (the night I was there) thunderous applause.

I personally felt the ending was a little abrupt; the war scenes served to oversimplify a message that was originally more complex than "Do you really think it's worth it to be part of a world where such evil exists?" However, such small points aside, for a first production Rebellion acquits itself very well: the stagecraft is efficient and seamless, the acting is excellent and the props well chosen. The play has a definite Absurdist, slightly Beckettian, feel. Perhaps this is what led to the surprising remark I heard on the way out: "Do you think such ultra-experimental theatre will ever become the norm?" Beyond pointing out that it was already old hat in 1980, there really wasn't much I could do.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Group Exhibition
Al-Shomou' Gallery, 12 Rd 150, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 2 Nov.
Ceramics, paintings and glassware by Salah Taher, Sabri Ragheb, Hoda Mourad, Mohamed Mandour, Gazbeiya Serri and Ossama Mohamed.

Mohamed Abla
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 2 Nov.

Brian Kwame and Maher Ali
Community Services Association, 4 Road 21, Maadi. Tel 350 5284/376 8232. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm, Thur 9am-5pm. Until 3 Nov.
African folklore in Kwame's paintings; Nile Delta village life in Ali's.

Gamal El-Sagini (Paintings and Sculptures)
Extra, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 4 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifain St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 7 Nov.
See opposite.

Hungarian Roots of Photography
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir Sq. Tel 357 5422/3/4. Daily exc Fri 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 9 Nov.
Photos from the Hungarian National Museum of Photography, 1914-1945.

Mari e Deserti D'Egitto (Seas and Deserts of Egypt)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-8pm. Until 9 Nov.
Photos by Vitaliano Napoleone and Gherardo La Francesca.

Nigerian Art (Paintings and Photographs)
Embassy of Nigeria, 13 Al-Gabalaya St, Zamalek. Tel 341 3573. 3-4 Nov, 11am-4pm & 5-9 Nov, 4pm-8pm.

Glada Simpson
Community Services Association, 4 Rd 21, Maadi. Tel 350 5284. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm; Thur 9am-5pm. 6-10 Nov.

Nazli Madkour
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 12 Nov.

Azza Abdel-Hamid
Al-Hanaguer Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. 5-12 Nov.
Collages, paintings and installations.

Adli Rizkallah (Sculptures and watercolours)
Centre of Arts, 2 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Nagdi
Salama Gallery, 36A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242/344 8109. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm. 6-16 Nov.

Nazih Rizq (Photography)
Al-Ahram Hall, Al-Ahram Building, Al-Galaa St. Tel 578 6300. Daily 10am-9pm. 6-20 Nov.

Yasser Grab
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. 6-30 Nov.

Student Art
Ewart Gallery, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-8pm. 7-30 Nov.
Drawings and paintings by AUC art students.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4.30pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4.30pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm, Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-4pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagi Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

FILMS

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Aiko Sweet Sixteen
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3/4. 2 Nov, 6pm. Arabic subtitles.
Directed by Akiyoshi Imazeki (1983).

La Notte (The Night)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8723. 8 Nov, 6pm.
Directed by Michaelangelo Antonioni (1961) and starring Marcello Mastroianni.

Dumb and Dumber
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Who's the dumbest, Jim Carrey or Jeff Daniels?

Amityville 3-D
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.
Wear the glasses and see 3-D.

Commando
Odeon, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
Schwartzneger back again.

Disclosure & Al-Moshaghebat Wal-Captain (The Pranksters and The Captain)
Normandy (outdoor), 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 7pm.
Double feature starting with the English film.

Die Hard III With a Vengeance
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St. Tel 360 6081/ 348 8600/700. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Bruce Willis and Samuel Jackson

Great Balls of Fire
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight.
Dennis Quaid as rock and roll legend Jerry Lee Lewis

Street Fighter
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme

Batman Forever
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Riddle me this, riddle me that, who's afraid of the big black bat?

Congo
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Where you are the endangered species.

The Flintstones
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Nadia El-Guindi, Farouk El-Fishawi, Mahmoud Hemeida.

Tuyur Al-Thalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana Palace, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Adel Imam, Youssra, Gamil Rateb, directed by Sherif Arafa.

Salah Taher in Al Shomou' Gallery

'Atabet Al-Settat (The Women's Threshold)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nabila Ebeid, Safeya El-Emari.

Al-Mala'eka La Taskon Al-Ard (Angels Don't Live On Earth)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 824. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Mamdouh Abdel-Alim, Poussy.

MUSIC

Sinfonietta
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0601/03. 5 Nov, 8pm.
Soloist and conductor Hassan Sharara performing Vivaldi's The Four Seasons.

Izmir Classical Turkish Music Chorus
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 7 Nov, 8pm.
Main Hall, Cairo University, Giza. 8 Nov, 8pm.

ARABIC MUSIC FESTIVAL

Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. 8pm.
2 Nov: Neda' Abu Mourad (Lebanon), Al-Farabi Singing Troupe with Zahi Gharib (Palestine), Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi; Angham and Ahmed Ibrahim perform (Egypt)
3 Nov: Abdou Ragheb Music Troupe and the National Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt); Mohamed Aman and Ali Abdel-Kerim (Saudi Arabia); Raga Belmelih (Morocco)
4 Nov: The Andalusian Music Ensemble (Algeria); Mohamed Abdel-Wahab Troupe (Egypt); Mohamed Sarwat pefoums with the Arabic Music Ensemble, conducted by Salah Ghobashi. (Egypt); Mustafa Dahla with the Al-Ghorbal Troupe (Palestine)
5 Nov: The Holy Spirit University Troupe, conducted by Aida Zeyada (Lebanon);
Dersaf Al-Hamdani (Tunisia); Ghada Reda Ragab and Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt), The Arab-Andalusian Singing Troupe with Abdou Al-Sherif and Haya Al-Idris (Morocco); Lutfi Boushnaq (Tunisia).
6 Nov: The Higher Institute of Music Troupe, (Kuwait); The Tunis Institute Troupe, supervised by Mahmoud Al-Qattan. (Tunisia); Mashayekh Al-Tarb Troupe (Syria)
7 Nov: Azmir Choral Troupe for Turkish Classical Music (Turkey); Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt); Iman Baqi (Syria)
8 Nov: Yarmuk University Arabic Music Ensemble (Jordan); Nay concerto by Azia Sharara and soloist Reda Bedeir, conducted by Hassan Sharar (Egypt); Arabic Music Ensemble (Egypt); Raba Al-Gamal (Egypt).

THEATRE

Ard La Tonbet Al-Zahour (A Land That Yields No Flowers)
Al-Hanaguer Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 8.30pm. Until 20 Nov
Starring Sawsan Badr and Abdou Al-Wazir.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily 9.30pm exc Mon.
A man pays dearly for deciding to run against the president in the elections.

Hazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Houssaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily 10pm, exc Tues.
Starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon & Fri 8pm.
Adel Imam in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor, Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Oloui as the *gamila* and everyone else as the *wehshin*.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhi

Loaly
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues. 9pm.
Musical starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Diouk (Cockerel Dances)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily 10pm, exc Tues.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istanbul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem,d Elham Shahine

La...Balash Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm
Poussi, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim, Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya...
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Fifi Abdou, Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily, exc Wed, 9pm.

LECTURES

Adventurers and Explorers in the Western Desert of Egypt
Netherlands Institute for Archeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 2 Nov, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr Anita Baaijens.

Resurrection and Interdependence of the Living and the Dead
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. 5 Nov, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr Fayza Heikal.

A Reading Into Naguib Mahfouz' *Autobiographical Echoes*
Association of Fine Arts Lovers, Ahmed Basha St, Garden City. 2 Nov, 6pm.
Lecture by Ambassador Abdel-Samie Zeineddin.

'Queens' Ware: Pottery From The Funerary Complex of Sesostris III in Dahshour
British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 5 Nov, 7pm.
Lecture by Susan Allen, research associate at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Adel Hassan Tarek

THE FOYER of the Al-Ahram building on Galaa Street hosts an exhibition of works by veteran soldiers. Paintings, sculptures, photographs, ceramics and textiles by 38 former soldiers are exhibited under the collective title Sacrifice, Loyalty and Hope.

The Mashrabiya Gallery shows recent works by Mohamed Abla — sculptures constructed from found objects, often plastic toys, reconstructed into future fossils. These are accompanied by monochromatic images of archetypal myths.

The VII Youth Salon continues at the Centre of Arts, Zamalek. Among the exhibits in the installation section is a piece by Adel Hassan Tarek, consisting of a row of dining chairs, seats removed, beneath panels containing empty bottles.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Filling the blanks

Nigel Ryan on the season's offerings from two leading private galleries. **Nur El-Messiri** looks at an artist showcased by Espace

Open doors and dialogue

Cultural life in Cairo clings valiantly to that rather quaint notion — the season. The season exists — one glance at Listings, opposite, compared with the rather sparse offerings of high summer, is proof enough of that. We are well into a new season. But what new faces will be on show?

Last month there were no surprises. Cairo-Berlin showed Nazli Madkour, one of Egypt's most ubiquitous artists, while the Mashrabiya exhibited Mohamed Abla, a leading light of the gallery's stable. Madkour exhibited works drawn from the past several years, while Abla showed recent pieces, assemblages of found objects, many of them sunk beneath clear plexi-glass, and largely monochromatic paintings that are a continuation of his last show at the Mashrabiya.

The assemblages include planets of debris — spheres of found objects and papier maché, totemic constructions and simple parables circumscribed by their convex frames. There is a tendency to append rather cutesy titles — *Memory of a Camel* — which invite the fabrication of narratives, or else to transform an assortment of plastic toys — two dolls' heads, a bunch of artificial flowers, and a toy gun — into polemic, as in *The North and South's Discussion*. The titles tend to distract from the formal qualities of the work, lending soft-focused, eco-friendly, anti-litter assemblages a hard-edged rhetoric they can barely support. This is a shame, since several of the pieces work well as what they are.

These are the current offerings. But what can we expect for the rest of the season?

Both galleries have interesting programmes in store, mixing the old and new. In November Cairo Berlin will exhibit works by Jean Crotti, a Swiss artist who showed, two years ago, at the Mashrabiya. Crotti then had completed a residency at Shabramont, the studio/house supported by Pro Helvetia. And the result of his stay was a series of witty cryptograms. His new works, according to Renate Jordan, proprietor of Cairo Berlin, are quite different, more sensuous and playful.

At the Mashrabiya Mohamed Abla will be followed by Yasser Grab and then, occupying the Christmas slot, Adel El-Siwi. Both are established exhibitors at the gallery. El-Siwi's canvasses seem to get bigger by the show, as he refines a technique that is immensely decorative and increasingly, self-consciously tasteful. El-Siwi's mannerisms would not be out of place in secessionist Vienna and as his canvasses assume architectural proportions we should not be surprised to discover a glint of Klimtian gold. It would be churlish to quibble with his technique. Increasingly, though, it is difficult to see his paintings outside larger decorative schemes. This is art in search of a salon.

Nothing could be further from the exuberance of Amr Heiba, an Alexandrian painter who has exhibited in Cairo twice to my knowledge, and who will be showing at Cairo-Berlin in January. Heiba's aesthetic is palpably plastic: his paint undergoes no metamorphosis. There are no mimetic tricks, no illusions of taste or toil. It is squeezed, scraped, smeared on the canvas. It sits there, unapologetic.

After Ramadan Mashrabiya will showcase an artist new to me, Shawki Ezzat, an Egyptian painter living in Amsterdam. The show will include 40 works, dating from 1991. During the same period Cairo-Berlin will be exhibiting paintings by Bernard Guillot.

Guillot first exhibited in Cairo at La Part du Sable in 1989. Then he showed large, symbolist inspired works that are at once romantic and extremely knowing. There is something about Guillot's work that reminds you of Puvis de Chavannes, though a Puvis buzzing along on speed. Gone is the innocence, the rather wishy-washy spiritualism, to be replaced by suggestive winks and an unashamedly camp indulgence.

Guillot, who now lives in a converted coffee shop in Paris, once lived in Cairo. Renate Jordan was introduced to him by the painter Anna Boughihian, when he was the only resident in a 25 roomed hotel on Ramsis Square. He produces in the most unlikely places. His exhibition at Cairo-Berlin may well be the highlight of the season.

"Only through dialogue do people learn what it means to be themselves." Renate Jordan, in stating the aim of her gallery — to facilitate a dialogue that might lead to self-knowledge — might also be giving a potted version of Guillot's credo. He has learned who he is, and is content to suddenly turn in his paintings and flash the spectator an irresistable smile.

Even when business is bad, Jordan is determined to keep on trying. There is something of the zealot about her. "You have to burn your fingers," she says. The gallery doors are open. According to its proprietor Cairo Berlin will keep its doors open. She will continue to show the best she can. "Everybody," she insists, "is invited."

Apart from the artists mentioned above those invited this season are Golo, the French cartoonist, Joseph Polleros, an Austrian photographer who divides his time between New York and Egypt, Norbert Schwontkowsky, a German artist who first exhibited in Cairo at last year's biennale, Eva Afuhs, creator of small-scale conceptual pieces, and Anna Boughihian.

After Shawki Ezzat at the Mashrabiya the programme becomes a little murky. There are plans to show a Moroccan, Syrian and German artist, but precisely when, and in what order, has yet to be decided.

NR





To look forward to, Bernard Guillot, left, who will be exhibiting at Cairo Berlin. Something for now — Omar El-Fayoumi at Espace

Sudden apparitions

In Omar El-Fayoumi's cityscapes, faces look out from behind round-arched windows. There are several floors to the building/painting, but you cannot tell precisely how many. Downstairs, not really outdoors — it is difficult to separate outdoors from indoors in this densely packed world — figures sit around *qahwa baladi* tables or stand in an archway. But what is this in the foreground? Can it be a knight in outlandish colours mounted on a rearing horse with one arm raised slaying something we cannot see?

When you first look at the cityscape — and even before your eye registers this last outlandish detail — you sense, in spite of the obviously urban elements, that you are also elsewhere. Though crowded with things secular, the space is hieratically ordered. You cannot count the buildings' floors because they are not floors as such, but rather, registers or tiers of a symbolic nature punctuated by Byzantine arches and reminiscent of iconostasis — those large icon-bearing screens used in Eastern Christian churches to shut off the sanctuary from the rest of the church. This might be no city of God but it is ordered according to a non-secular aesthetic.

The principles of composition tell us we are sometime before Giotto, with Cimabue, before the western European obsession with three-dimensional perspective and "personal space". We are in a medieval or Byzantine world, south of Italy and definitely east. If we are to borrow T.E. Hulme's grand but felicitous generalisation that, in terms of category, all art is either ancient Egyptian or ancient Greek, then the hieratic, "space shy" world of El-Fayoumi's cityscapes is Egyptian indeed.

At a formal level — tiered, hieratic, flat, ordered not according to the laws of perspective, gravity, mortality and so on — El-Fayoumi's cityscapes are marked by the sacred. So too at the level of leitmotif. In some of the cityscapes, a Fayoum portrait or a madonna and child will occasionally look out of the Byzantine window next door And then of course there is Mar Girgis (St George).

But is it Mar Girgis? or Sidna Khidr (His Holiness, Green)? Elias perhaps? And if it is the dragon slayer, saviour on horseback, why is it that no one in the picture thinks it a big deal? Why is it that, though some of the figures do watch the spectacle, some merely take note of it and others do not even notice?

The largest of the exhibition and the one that might seem out of place, painting no. 1 provides a clue. A man — recognisably of flesh, with biceps and shoulder muscles — pulls a resisting horse forward through smoke. The horse, unlike that upon which the Mar Girgis figure in other paintings is mounted, has recognisably individual wisps of hair in his mane and his eye is portrayed in a relatively "naturalistic" manner. Crashing into the black and white man and horse, is a reddish trapezoid carrying a silhouette of the saviour on horseback. The man pulling a horse and the knight mounted on a horse literally exist on different planes. A miracle perhaps? Sidna Elias saving the man and his horse from a fire? We do not know. What we do register is that there are two separate planes which, if they have not intersected then at least, have achieved a tangential relation.

If the theological concept of "miracle" can be translated geometrically, it lies in the intersection of otherwise discontinuous planes, that of the natural/human and that of the supernatural/divine. So why isn't anyone in the other paintings where such intersections do occur making a fuss about the miraculous? Were "the old masters" "never wrong" — as Auden wrote — in their awareness that even a miracle "must run its course/Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot"?

The cityscapes *are* cityscapes. Though they have been ordered hieratically, they have not been suffused with or permeated by the supernatural. The elements constituting the city are secular (Pepsi signs, the *qahwa baladi*, cars). Though in themselves things of the world and without aura, they are arranged according to principles pertaining to things not of this world. The sacred order is an imposition — from without; just as the miraculous apparition of a saviour on horseback interrupts and jars in the natural world or picture plane.

Like his cityscapes, El-Fayoumi's icons also exhibit this coexistence of sacred and secular which does not, nevertheless, confound the two. There are large icons in the Fayoum portrait style; there are smaller ones reflecting El-Fayoumi's training in Leningrad; and there are paintings of the Mar Girgis/Sidna Khidr/the Prophet Elias figure in isolation (i.e. not set in the cityscape). None of them have been humanised as saints in the Western tradition have been. You can ask these saints formally to intercede for you but, since they have not been made visually to obey the laws of gravity and perspective, you cannot by any means "relate" to or "identify" with them. They belong to another plane of reality. But — and here is the paradox — their images are reproducible, if not three a penny, then at least not invaluable. They can, without corruption, proliferate. There are nine Mar Girgises: same lines, same silhouette, same... but the colours are different. You can mix and match without getting mixed up. Not everyone can own a relic of her own or a 13th century icon but, thanks to the democratising potentials of firmly fixing the silhouette/image/icon once and for all, everyone can have a piece of the sacred.

If you do not like the bright colours of things reproducible or the easy-to-read image of a saviour on horseback so beloved of the masses, there is a darker more mystical icon. A figure (is it a woman? a Mary Magdalene — there's a hint of scarlet in her dress— turned pensive? A man? St Michael as the artist says? How can he be if he doesn't have wings?... This one is *not* easy to read) emerges against a brownish rectangle within which is embedded a whitish one containing a black square. The black square is the halo. Instead of illuminating the visage, it darkens it.

But for this last, dark image (together with that of the black man pulling the black horse) this exhibition could be called a bit too pretty and jolly. After all, there are no dragons here. In one painting, there's a fuzzy brown shape (it could be a Labrador for all one knows); in another, an eye. But otherwise, one really does not know what the outlandish man on horseback thinks he is saving us from. Whatever it is, it cannot be too horrifying; if it was, he'd be sure to have his spear with him everytime he appeared and not just occasionally. And does a saviour on horseback make sense without an evil foe? Where, if indeed we are in Byzantium, are the black vestments, dark interiors and altars hidden in arcane symbols from the gaze of the unintiated? There isn't much of the dark and sublime in El-Fayoumi's exhibition but at least there are one or two such things.

But back to the masses slouched at the *qahwa* table only dimly (through a glass darkly perhaps?) taking note of a caped, plumed Quixote in armour. The question of their level of sensitivity is, given the compositional context, superflous. Secular though they are, they exist in a space *already* ordered by arches and tiers, a space in which the sacred is translated into architectonic norms: building principles, buildings, institutions. The miracle, in this context, violates those norms. It breaks through, does its theatrical bit and goes off on its way and returns to the sacred plane — one which has not been translated into the human.

In this connection, a folk story El-Fayoumi once heard is illuminating. A woman travelling in her carriage from one village to another was attacked by highwaymen. She called out for help. Immediately and out of nowhere a man on horseback appeared. (Though the woman didn't know, it was Mar Girgis, Sarie El-Nadha, the one who is quickly summoned.) He defeated the highwaymen, tied them up and took them to the nearest police station. Since he was the only witness, he had to sign the relevant forms. He signed them and quietly, without much to do, left. The policemen and the woman looked at the signature. There, in gold lettering, was "Mar Girgis". *(For exhibition details, see Listings)*

NM

Plain Talk

Arguments about the state's relationship to the arts recur regularly enough to make the topic a real issue. There are those who oppose any role for the state, those who recommend it, and those who feel ambivalent about state intervention.

Nor does the controversy rage only in Egypt. It has now become a popular source of argument worldwide. An interesting discussion of the state's role in relation to the arts took place in the USA some time ago, between four leading art experts, and has since been published under the title *The State of The Arts*. The discussion centered around the role of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Lewis Lapham, a journalist who writes for several publications, including *San Francisco Examiner*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Harper's* magazine launched a vehement attack against any state role in the arts. He begins by asking for complete elimination of all federal buildings for the arts, accusing the government of not knowing how to play the role of patron. He distinguishes between patronage and encouragement. The government can encourage artistic expression, but only by providing subsidies to art institutions and libraries.

Government patronage, according to him, has resulted in mediocrity, a mediocrity most apparent in the design of government buildings constructed over two centuries.

Patrons, according to Lapham, should be artists themselves. One finds that successive Holy Roman emperors, who were themselves composers, were patrons of music. There were German princes who sang operas and the patrons of various poets during the Elizabethan age were poets themselves, writing sonnets and playing the viole. The patron, in other words, "should have some familiarity with the subject under discussion. But the Americans do not have the confidence for this."

Lapham quotes John Adams concerning his hope that art would have no place in the new republic because "from the dawn of history the arts had been the product of despotism and superstition". Benjamin Franklin echoed Adams when he insisted that "to Americans one schoolmaster is worth a dozen poets, and the invention of a machine or the improvement of an implement is of far more importance than a masterpiece of Raphael".

There obviously seems to be a kind of distrust of art. Americans have turned to Europe for poets, painters, dancing masters, violinists, interior decorators and "anybody else who promises to civilise the barbarians" says Lapham. The less patronage there is the better for the country. He believes that reduction of patronage on all levels might bring about a rejuvenation of the American cultural enterprise.

Hilton Kramer, editor of *Arts* magazine and art critic for *The Nation* and *The New York Times* fears an erosion of the concepts of high culture and quality. Neither the universities nor mass media can safeguard these two complementary concepts. But, in spite of this, he praises the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Kramer ends by saying: "When we talk about the life of art in our culture and the future of the arts, and what we are funding and thinking of funding, these are the kind of things that have to be kept in mind."

Samuel Lipman, a concert pianist and a regular contributor to the *London Times*' literary supplement, starts with two maxims: "support should go to the arts because they are art" and "those doing the support should be committed, sophisticated and discriminating in their choice of causes of patronage." Before art can be supported, however, there must be art to support. Many years have gone by without any significant new works being added to the permanent repertoire of serious music. Optimists suggest that "ours is an age of performance" which has produced many musicians and expanded audiences.

Given this dearth of good art what, then, is a patron to do? Real art should be supported if it exists. If it does not, then more should be given to encourage the flow of good art. But what is happening, claims Lipman, is that the funds go to secondary activities. However, he does not agree with Lapham's suggestion that America is behind Europe. In fact, he says, art the world over is in approximately the same state.

Reading the debate I was reminded of the words of Irving Babitt "A man needs to look up to standards set so much above his ordinary self as to make him feel that he is himself the underdog. The man who thus looks up is becoming worthy to be looked upon in turn and to this extent qualifying for lead "

The state and the arts seems to be a topic that will never turn stale.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

Nights at the pictures

Alif (Journal of Comparative Poetics), Arab Cinematics: Toward the New and Alternative, Cairo: AUC Press, 1995

The new, 15th issue of *Alif (Journal of Comparative Poetics)* published annually by the AUC Department of English and Comparative Literature, was a surprise that came as no surprise at all. For the past 15 years *Alif* has been dedicating its issues to bookish topics — *The Mystical Dimension in Literature, Marxism and Critical Discourse, Metaphor and Allegory in the Middle Ages*. The current issue is dedicated to cinema and given the expectedly portentous subtitle — *Arab Cinematics: Toward the New and the Alternative.* The theme is hardly surprising, given current celebrations of the centenary of world cinema and Egypt's honourable record within that history.

Though *Alif* chose for its topic audio-visuals this by no means implied that it has abandoned its scholarly edge. Among the array of academics lined up in this edition are Edward Said (Professor of Comparative Literature, Columbia University) and Raymond Baker (Professor of International Relations, Williams College). In addition to academic contributors, the current issue contains an Arabic section dedicated to interviews with and testimonies of directors from all over the Arab world.

Among the most interesting of these interviews is the one conducted with the Syrian director Mohamed Malas. Malas has contributed to Arab cinema some of its most important documentary as well as narrative films. His documentary *The Dream* figures prominently in this issue of *Alif*, though the film itself was never completed. Malas was working on the project, which documented the lives of Palestinians in a Beirut refugee camp, when the massacres of Sabra and Shatilla took place. Instead of completing the film Malas published the material in book form under the title A Film Diary (Dar Al-Adab, Beirut) extracts of which appear in *Alif* translated and introduced by Rebecca Porteons. In the translated extracts Malas gives a very interesting interpretation of dreams versus day-dreams, connecting the former to the actual conditions of the Palestinians whose reality he sought to depict, the latter to their political expression.

Another interesting testimony of a cinema practitioner is given by Omani director Hatem Hamad, who believes that Arab cinema runs contrary to the case of Arabic poetry, one trying to rid itself of the authority of tradition, the other very much a continuation of that tradition. The Iraqi director Mohamed Shukri Jamil disagrees with Hamad's thesis, believing that cinematic creativity is conditioned by poetic, musical and pictorial vocabularies. According to Jamil "art imitates nature, but it should imitate nature's creativity... the artistic work, whether a film or a poem or a painting, will have its own specificity while retaining the principle of the naturally organic."

The celebrated Syrian director Omar Amiralay speaks about cinema as a homeless art while Kuwaiti director Khaled Sidik insists on cinema depicting the struggle of a specific people in a specific locale at a specific time — "the struggle of fathers and forefathers". Sidik's position is predictable given his cinematic preoccupation with depicting the age-old, pre-oil struggle of Kuwaitis with the sea. Tunisian director Nacer Khemir talks to Khemais Khayati about *The Lost Ring of the Dove*, inspired, says its director, by Sufi poetry. "It is," he says, "like the poetry and the stories of mystics; it is the opposite of death and destruction; it is an anthem of love."

Last in the section dedicated to cinema practitioners is veteran Egyptian director Tewfik Saleh who airs his views on the Egyptian audience and its seeming penchant for cinema. He believes that for audience "Egyptian cinema, in its early phase, was an extension of the musical phonograph record", a view diametrically opposed to that of Pierre Maxime Schule, who considers cinema an extension of the waxworks museum, a fast-forward *tableaux vivants*.

Raymond Baker's "Combative Cultural Politics: Film Art and Political Spaces in Egypt", which opens the English section of this issue of *Alif*, is of great value to those who wish to view Egyptian films not merely as entertainment but to read their cultural significations. Baker's interpretation of the relationship between the title of Atef El-Tayeb's The Innocent and the film itself is interesting indeed. "Innocence," he writes, "alluded to in the film title, materialises in the quality of the peasant's love for the land and its fruits, aesthetic when his touch transforms a seed into a fruit, erotic when he conceals the nakedness of his own beautiful form in its (the land's) canal water, sexual when he thrusts his whole body into the work of making it fertile."

This volume, combining testimonies of practitioners with sophisticated theoretical work — Edward Said's "Alternative Cinema and Political Consciousness," Sabri Hafez's "Shifting Identities in Maghrebi Cinema: The Algerian Paradigm", Maureen Kiernan's "Cultural Hegemony and National Film Language: Youssef Chahine" and Walter Armbrust's "New Cinema, Commercial Cinema and the Modernist Tradition in Egypt" — is a welcome contribution to the understanding of cinema in the Arab world, a cinema that does not only suffer from the impatience and indifference of its spectators, but also from the often unjust accusations of Arab intellectuals that it seeks nothing but commercial profit and box office success.

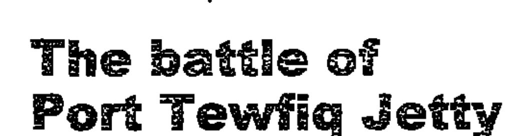
Reviewed by ***Ahmed Ali Bedawi***

Wars over Suez

For the people living in the Suez Canal zone, October is the month of military invasions. The 29th marked the beginning of the 1956 Suez War and the ensuing resistance of the people of Port Said to the tripartite aggression which began with Israeli paratroops dropping into the Mitla Pass in Sinai to give Britain and France a pretext to attack Egypt. British and French paratroops dropped in brigade strength into the canal zone two days later. It was during the Egyptian army's withdrawal from the Mitla Pass that the barbaric massacre of 49 Egyptian POWs occurred, as revealed by retired Israeli general Arye Biro only a few weeks ago. October also saw repeated attempts by Israel to occupy the city of Suez in the 1973 War. Those attempts reached their climax on 24 October, now celebrated as Suez Day to commemorate the city's heroic resistance which foiled the Israeli effort. Of 24 October, Israeli author Shlomo Arad wrote in his book *Yom Kippur*: "Fire was coming from every house, window or aperture. There was not a single house not showering all sorts of fire from weapons ranging from automatic rifles to hand grenades. Our wounded soldiers were lying on the streets and the paratroops who went to their rescue were pinned down beside them. On all our radio receivers, we could hear the same message: 'Help! We cannot stand this any longer.'"



Major General Fathi, *major in 1973*, taking over the position from the Israeli commander



The battle of Port Tewfiq Jetty

At the southern approaches to Suez, and East of the Suez Canal, there existed a strong fortified position for the Israeli army, comprising six bunkers, and a command post. That position, occupied during the 1967 war, was located on Port Tewfiq Jetty, and from it the Israeli army was able to frequently shell the city of Port Tewfiq, many positions in Suez, the fertiliser factory in Adabiya, and the Zaitiya area of oil installations.

The seizure of the position became an important target for the Egyptians from the first day of the October War. That objective was achieved a week into the war, thanks to the heroism of a commando battalion led by Major General Zagloul Mohamed Fathi, then a major, who spoke to the Weekly *about the battle of Port Tewfiq Jetty.*

"The plan was carried out in three stages. First, the stage of isolating the position, carried out by two commando platoons which crossed the canal at its meeting point with the Gulf of Suez and accomplished its mission late on the evening of Oct. 6. The position was besieged.

"The second stage came on 7 October, where a commando company joined the platoons besieging the position, thus making the siege complete. From that moment until 12 October, some of the fiercest battles between the Egyptians and the Israelis took place, in which the Israelis used artillery and airplanes.

"On 13 October, and as the Israelis were cut off completely, with no air, navy or land support able to penetrate the siege, the Israeli command took the decision to surrender in the presence of a Red Cross representative. On 13 October, we picked up signals sent by the commander of the position, asking permission from his headquarters to surrender, and they told him that they would notify the Red Cross.

"The battle was at its peak, and one bomb or a few bullets could have finished off everybody in the bunkers, but we stopped shooting the minute we knew of their intention to surrender. We accepted immediately to hand over the Israelis to the representative of the Red Cross. Thus the third stage of the mission of taking over the position was accomplished.

"The scene of the surrender itself is a record of honour for the Egyptian army. It was 11.30 a.m. when the representative of the Red Cross accompanied by foreign journalists arrived. We marched to the position. An interpreter spoke to the Israeli commander in Hebrew, asking him to come out carrying a white flag. The Israeli officer came out, surrounded by ten other soldiers. The Red Cross representative crossed in a dingy, brought back the commander and a doctor. The commander gave the military salute and I saluted in return and the hand-over was accomplished.

"The commander had notified me that there were 42 Israelis in the bunkers, 5 of them dead and 15 with serious injuries. I called for ambulances and the required Egyptian medical staff, and we took the Israelis to Port Tewfiq, where we offered them water and cigarettes to those who wanted. Though this position was responsible for innumerable shellings of Egyptian positions west of the Canal, including civilian areas, we did not for a second contemplate retaliation."

Major General Fathi's testimony was recorded by ***Galal Nassar.***









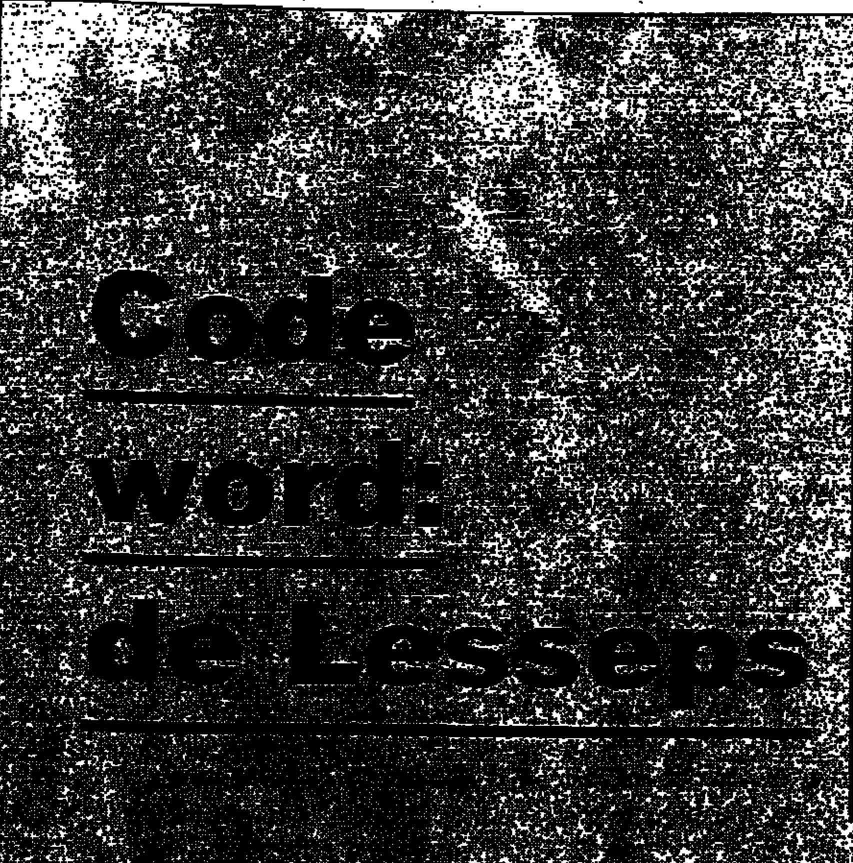
Stages of Israeli surrender on Port Tewfiq Jetty, as captured by the camera of *Al-Ahram's* Mohamed Lutfi



Israeli soldiers happy to evacuate Suez



Code Word: de Lesseps







An Egyptian [illegible] protest meeting in Trafalgar Square: no other issue has divided Britain so deeply since World War II

On 29 October 1956, Egypt was attacked by British, French and Israeli forces combined. Fayza Hassan **retraces the main events which led to the Suez War**

"In the earlier days, when Gamal Abdel-Nasser came to power, he defined his two priorities," says Amin Howeidi, former minister of defence and former head of intelligence. "The first was to rid Egypt of British occupation, the second to promote economic development. What he did to achieve these two goals provoked the West and Israel. From that moment on all that was needed was a pretext. They found it in the nationalisation of the Suez Canal."

In October 1954 an agreement was signed by Abdel-Nasser and Anthony Nutting of the British Foreign Office according to which all British troops would be withdrawn from the Suez Canal Base within twenty months. The agreement also provided that the base could be reactivated any time during the seven following years in the event of an attack by an outside power on an Arab League state or on Turkey. Nasser called the agreement "the biggest single achievement in Egypt's national aspirations to date," although it is said that he secretly remained uneasy about the reactivation clause. His doubts were to be proven justified less than two years later. "To understand what followed," says Howeidi, "it is important to place the events in their context."

It was a period of pacts against the USSR but Nasser refused to let Egypt be drawn into one of these alliances. On the contrary, he strongly criticised the Baghdad pact and resisted British pressure to join. Anthony Eden, the then British prime minister, was enraged, leading the British ambassador, Humphrey Trevelyan, to comment: "In the Middle East, the British never saw the writing on the wall until they hit their head against it." Official relations between Egypt and Britain kept deteriorating. Some accounts often cite, as one of the reasons for the events that were to follow, personal hatred between Eden and Nasser.

On the other hand Nasser developed a friendship with Tito which was instrumental in changing his way of thinking: "Together, [Tito] and Nasser developed the concept of non-alignment, a policy that entailed the avoidance of anti-Russian or pro-Western pacts, but did not debar them from receiving aid or purchasing arms from either side," writes Derek Hopwood in *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1990* (Routledge, 1993).

Attending the conference of non-aligned nations in Bandung, Nasser met Indonesian President Sukarno and Chinese Premier *Chou-En Lai. He began to think in new terms.*

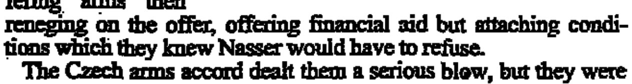
The Egyptians had obtained their arms from the West until this point. There had been an outstanding order with Britain since 1949. Nasser met with reluctance from the US, Britain and France, all less than willing to fulfil his need for arms. While the Western powers were dilly-dallying, attaching unacceptable conditions to any arms deal (the British wanted adherence to the anti-Soviet pacts, the US was involved with Israel more or less secretly, the French asked for non-interference in the Algerian national movement), Israel was actively rearming, helped by France.

In 1955, during the Bandung non-alignment conference, Nasser had approached Chou-En Lai about the possibilities of acquiring arms from the Chinese. Chou, who depended on Russia for his supplies, promised to make inquiries on his behalf.

Later, the Russians approached Nasser through their ambassador. As no positive move was forthcoming from the West, Nasser saw his only alternative as accepting the Soviet deal and buying the Czech arms offered.

On hearing the news, US Under-secretary of State John Foster Dulles hastened to send George Allan, his special envoy, to express Washington's displeasure in no uncertain terms. Nasser politely informed him that at this point his decision was not negotiable.

"For a time," writes Hopwood, "Nasser was unwilling to destroy his ties with the West finally, as he was unsure whether Russia could supply the kind of technical and financial aid he was seeking." This was particularly true of his relations with the Americans. But Washington did not seem able to get its act together, offering arms then reneging on the offer, offering financial aid but attaching conditions which they knew Nasser would have to refuse.



Egyptians protesting in the streets of Cairo

The Czech arms accord dealt them a serious blow, but they were loath to alienate Nasser completely.

The turning point in the relationship was brought about by the Egyptians' decision to build the High Dam at Aswan. The size of the project required financing from abroad. In December, two months after the announcement of the Czech arms deal and apparently encouraged by George Allan's mixed message, Nasser sent Minister of Finance Abdel-Moneim Kaissouni to Washington, for discussions with the administration of the World Bank. On 9 December, Eisenhower announced that he would be asking Congress for $200 million over a ten-year period for the dam and four days later Eugene Black, president of the World Bank, sent Kaissouni a *letter indicating that the Bank was in principle prepared to advance* a similar sum for the same purpose. Dulles had earlier asked Nasser for an assurance that the first arms deal with the Eastern bloc would be the last. This was "an undertaking Nasser felt nobody had a right to demand of him and one which he would not give," writes Mohamed Hassanein Heikal in *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes* (Andre Deutsch, 1968).

Nasser was having great doubts, he admitted publicly, about the sincerity of the West. The West, in response, expressed great doubts about the possibility of constructing the dam. While relations steadily deteriorated between Cairo and Washington, the Russians were offering increasing amounts of aid including a loan to finance the Aswan Dam, writes Hopwood.

On 19 July, without informing Nasser, the Americans suddenly withdrew their offer: A communiqué was released to the press stating that "an important consideration bearing upon the feasibility of the undertaking of building the [Aswan] dam and thus the practicality of American aid, was Egyptian readiness and ability to concentrate its resources upon this vast construction programme. Developments in the preceding seven months have not been favourable to the success of the project and the US Government has concluded that it is not feasible in present circumstances to participate in the project." The British soon followed suit for their share in the project.

Nasser wanted to strike back quickly, and 23 July, the anniversary of the revolution, seemed a befitting occasion. Nasser had made up his mind that he would answer with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. But first he needed an evaluation on possible military reprisals.

In his assessment Nasser saw the greatest danger coming from Eden, much less from Christian Pineau, the French minister of defence; as for Ben Gurion, the Israeli prime minister, he had all but dismissed him.

"The nearest British bases for land, sea and air forces were in Malta or Cyprus where Britain's Middle East headquarters had been moved after the agreement to withdraw from the canal zone," explains Heikal. Although Nasser had important intelligence contacts in both areas he decided to send special emissaries "and it would be on the basis of their assessment that he would make a final decision."

The world was expecting Nasser's answer, but 23 July was celebrated with an unremarkable speech. The emissaries having not yet returned he was biding his time but, reports Heikal, right after *the 23 July speech he asked* Mahmoud Younis, "the man responsible for all operations in the country relating to oil production, 'Mahmoud, can you run the Canal?'" It was the first Younis had heard of Nasser's intentions.

Plans were made for a quiet takeover using the effect of surprise to the full. Younis was to hand-pick those who would be involved and proceed — when the order was given — to occupy simultaneously all the buildings of the Suez Canal Company, in Cairo, Suez and Ismailia. Nasser wanted to give the company's officials no time to destroy vital information. Younis would be operating under martial law.

On Wednesday 25 July all the emissaries had filed their reports. The new assessment based on their information encouraged Nasser to go ahead. He first informed the members of the Revolutionary *Command Council (RCC)* and the *Cabinet* ministers swearing them to secrecy. Dismissing their few objections he gave Younis the green light and told him to wait for the code word "de Lesseps."

On 26 July, the anniversary of the king's expulsion, Nasser delivered the traditional Alexandrian speech in Manshieh Square. It is in this square that he made the historic announcement mentioning the man responsible for the building of the canal several times. "Then pandemonium erupted and scenes of wild excitement broke out in towns and villages." Younis, as soon as he heard the code word, went into action. "Nasser told Younis that there must be no hitch and there was none," writes Heikal. "Twenty four hours after the event the canal traffic was running smoothly and the most important decision in Nasser's career had proved itself totally justified."

The British and the French — contrary to Nasser's assessment — were slow to react. There were too many opposing interests and ulterior motives to allow any Western power to involve itself in a hasty move. The Russians after all had a foot in Egypt.

Eden clamoured for strong action but the US opted for diplomacy. To justify an attack a pretext was necessary. After all, reasoned the Americans, Nasser's nationalisation preceded by a few years the time when the canal was going to be rightfully Egypt's. His act would not warrant military action in the eyes of other governments and may turn public opinion against the Western powers. But the uneasy armistice between Egypt and Israel could become the needed factor to alter the situation and US reluctance, thought the British. Top secret contacts were made with Israel to prepare for something which was to its advantage and would "cut Nasser down to size."

The British then turned to France. They needed the French to help them hatch their plan and convince the Israelis.

Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd reported after discussions with the French ambassador that "the French were ready to go all the way with us. They would be prepared to put French forces under British command if this was necessary, and contemplate making land and air forces available as well as naval forces."

The reluctance of the Americans to undertake overt action, fear of provoking the Russians and the Muslim world, discussions between the Western powers, delayed considerably the British-French reaction to the nationalisation of the canal.

The first formal Franco-Israeli meeting took place in Sèvres outside Paris with the British very much present but still in the background. It was an uneasy meeting: the parties involved had reservations and different interests and priorities. It was followed by *several less formal meetings to iron out existing difficulties.* Finally during a second formal meeting at Sèvres, the Sèvres Protocol was drafted.

The Protocol recorded that Israel would launch a full scale attack on the afternoon of 29 October. The next day, the French and British governments would demand that Egypt and Israel cease fire and withdraw to within ten miles on either side of the canal, while Anglo-French forces established a temporary occupation of the key positions on the canal. The inevitable Egyptian refusal of the ultimatum would justify an Anglo-French attack early on 31 October.

An annex, signed by France and Israel — and withheld from the British — stated that French fighters and pilots would be based on Israeli airfields and French ships would protect the Israeli coast. *The Protocol which called* for endorsement by the three governments was duly signed and a copy provided to each delegation.

In *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), W Scott Lucas writes: "Secretly, without the knowledge of their Parliaments, their public and most of their civil servants, and in Britain's case her military commanders, Britain, France and Israel had declared war upon Egypt."

Public campaign for POWs



photo: AFP

The photo dated 1956 shows Israeli forces guarding a group of Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai Desert

A campaign for the investigation and prosecution of Israeli soldiers who murdered Egyptian POWs is gathering momentum, reports **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

Egyptian intellectuals are seeking to establish a non-governmental committee to expose the full details of the atrocities committed by the Israeli army during the 1956 and 1967 wars. Dr Ismail Sabry Abdallah told *Al-Ahram Weekly* "We are calling for an investigation of the massacres and the prosecution of *the murderers* responsible."

In an article published in *Al-Ahram*, Abdallah urged Egyptian intellectuals to launch a public campaign against the cold-blooded murder of Egyptian POWs and civilians which violates human rights and all internationally-accepted conventions.

"First, the committee will have to compile files of the families of soldiers listed as missing in the wars. These soldiers were either killed or captured by the Israelis. This meticulous documentation process is necessary to facilitate investigations at a later stage," he said. The proposed committee would start work soon after the documentation is completed.

According to Abdallah, a sense of outrage is growing among many intellectuals. They demand that the committee's findings be presented to the United Nations in order to expose Israeli army atrocities.

This endeavour reflects the growing anger in Egypt since a former Israeli officer admitted he ordered the execution of 49 Egyptian POWs during the 1956 Suez War. An Israeli historian has estimated that more than 1,000 Egyptian soldiers were murdered in the 1956 and 1967 wars.

This issue has prompted opposition papers to call for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and severing diplomatic ties with Israel. Public rallies organised by the Egyptian Human Rights Organisation demanded "throwing *Zionists* out of Egypt" and featured banners with slogans such "we will not settle for less than the trial of Zionist war criminals".

Though the Egyptian government has maintained a *low-key approach* to the killings, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has drawn up an official memorandum to be presented to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. It proposes the establishment of an Israeli military committee to look into the allegations; the trial of Israeli officers who admitted that they committed the murders; that Egypt takes legal action in Israel; compensation for the victims' families; and the formation of a joint committee to locate the burial grounds of the murdered POWs.

"The government is not involved with the committee's task," said Saadeddin Wahba, head of the Arab Artists' Union, who was nominated as a member of the proposed committee. "The government's approach to this case is governed by certain factors. However, we are talking about popular sentiment. This committee will come into being through the backing of the public and the families who lost their sons in these brutal massacres," he added.

Many Egyptian legal experts interviewed by the *Weekly* were pessimistic about the success of diplomacy in this matter.

"We will not get anywhere with the Israelis through diplomatic channels," commented Amir Salem, a lawyer. "We will rely on public support. Israeli army officers cannot commit crimes of this magnitude and think they can get away with it."

A personal testimony

The recent revelations of the brutal murder of Egyptian POWs by Israeli soldiers during the 1956 and 1967 wars have evoked bitter memories and renewed grief for many families. Aliya Rushdi, widow of Dr Abdel-Moneim Hafez who served at Khan Younis Hospital, talks about the tragic circumstances of her husband's death in 1956.

"I was just 18 years old when I got married to Hafez on 9 September 1956. He was a young man of 27 and had just started his medical career. At that time, talk of war overshadowed the lives of most Egyptians, but when Hafez was assigned by the government to lead a medical team heading for Khan Younis hospital, I was not worried because it never crossed my mind that he would be killed. 'He is not on the front lines,' I would say to myself, 'hospitals don't get attacked.'

"We saw Hafez off to Gaza in November 1956. A week later, I discovered that I was pregnant. I was very happy and wished he would come back as soon as possible to hear the good news.

But something terrible happened two days later. We heard that Khan Younis hospital had been bombed by Israeli forces. The news left us all in shock.

"For five months my family and I waited for news. People said they had heard him speaking on *Sawt Al-Arab* (The Voice of the Arabs' radio station) but we heard nothing.

"Finally, a friend of my father's told him that the Israeli forces had gone into the hospital and shot my husband in cold blood along with two other physicians. I received the shock of my life, *one that I could* never recover from. My mother went to Khan Younis to fetch Hafez's body. I could not go because I was about to give birth. They killed him while he was carrying out his duties treating the victims of war. He took pride in what he was doing. He believed in what he did and nothing could have stopped him from doing his duty.

"In 1962 I went to the States to complete my postgraduate studies. *I did this in an attempt to recover* from my ordeal. It was very hard, but I had to leave because everything reminded me of what had happened. The agony went on and on. I had to escape the war atmosphere which had become part of our daily fare.

Now after 38 years, many questions remain unanswered. Most important of which is how the killing of doctors and the bombing of a hospital can go unnoticed by the international community.

I can understand that soldiers are ordered to kill enemy soldiers in war, but what I cannot understand is the slaughter of medical personnel. If this had happened to an *Israeli doctor, they would have* made a big fuss about it and left no stone unturned to find the culprits and demand compensation, as they did for the victims of the Holocaust.

"The revelations of the Israeli officer who confessed to the murder of Egyptian POWs in November 1956 brought back all the bitterness and sad memories of that time. I thought I would do something that I should have done a *long time ago, so my son and I* started writing a letter to Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and to Mohamed Bassiouni, Egypt's ambassador to Israel.

"I do not ask for compensation, because all the money in the world will not make up for one moment of the grief and despair which we have gone through for over three decades. We just want our martyrs and POWs to be honoured and appreciated. We want to tell the Israelis that they are not as free of guilt as they would like to think, for they have committed war crimes and broken all internationally-accepted conventions (the killing of medical personnel is *in violation of the Geneva Convention*). I have lived with pain all my life and now I would like all the facts to be known. Because, in this way, some of the other victims will hopefully be vindicated for the terrible suffering they have had to endure."

Alyia Rushdi, chairperson of the Middle Eastern Studies department at Wayne State University, Michigan, spoke to ***Omayma Abdel-Latif.***

No cure but prevention

The debate rages on over which type of hepatitis virus is the most dangerous, while the number of infected patients continues to rise rapidly. The Egyptian Society for Medical Microbiology held its fourth international conference in Cairo to discuss the causes and effects of the virus. Nermeen El-Nawawi reports



Viruses A and B can both be prevented through community hygiene and vaccination photo: Al-Ahram

The Fourth International Conference of the Egyptian Society for Medical Microbiology was held in Cairo in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine, Zaqaziq University. The conference was held for four days under the auspices of Dr Ali Abdel-Fattah, minister of health, and Dr Ramzi El-Shaer, president of Zagazig University. The theme of the conference was "Hepatitis; a Challenge to Human Health".

Representatives of the World Health Organisation, together with medical practitioners from Egypt, Kuwait, the US, Denmark and Libya, participated in the conference. The first of three plenary sessions was devoted to an overview of the problem of hepatitis, the second to the most recent advances in diagnosing hepatitis and the third to the methods of transmission of the different types of hepatitis and the factors leading to the spread of the disease. Also discussed were the available types of vaccines for types A and B and trials for a suitable vaccine against type C. In addition to the plenary sessions, there were 11 abstract sessions that discussed 32 papers.

In his opening speech, Dr Abdel-Fattah said that the ministry is currently launching a preventive campaign against infection through compulsory preventive measures. First among these is offering free vaccinations for almost 1.5 million newborns, almost four million school children and 13 million registered in the health insurance programme. The second is enforcing hygiene measures in food preparation and retail. The third is restricting the use of injections to disposable needles. The fourth is the tight inspection of blood transfusion bags.

The ministry is also conducting blood examinations for viral diseases, whether hepatitis or AIDS, at its central laboratories in order to guarantee the accuracy of medical certificates submitted by Egyptian expatriates. "We have received 96 thousand samples in our central laboratories all over the republic since March," the minister said. Of this sample, 3.5 per cent were from women infected with type B, while one percent were from women infected with type B. Nine cases of AIDS were also detected.

The minister affirmed that the number of patients infected with type C in the sample, though not specified, is definitely less than the number found in past studies. Five groups of hepatitis viruses have now been defined: A, B, C, D, and E.

Hepatitis is difficult to control. No effective treatment has been found so far. Antiviral drugs and Interferon therapy are expensive and dissatisfactory. Further, many cases of hepatitis have a tendency towards chronicity. The more chronic the illness, the more destructive its effect on the patient's general health and the higher the tendency to develop liver cancer, especially among type B and C patients.

Until the late 1960s, scientists and practitioners assumed that there were only two types of viruses that infect the liver. Hepatitis A, transmitted through the fecal oral route as in contaminated food or drink, causes infective hepatitis. Hepatitis B, transmitted through the blood in skin cuts and contaminated syringes, causes serum hepatitis. Later on, other types of hepatitis were discovered.

The number of individuals infected with type B worldwide has not been determined. But the case is different for virus A. "There are 1.4 million new cases of hepatitis A per year," said Dr Fatma Sobhi, professor of microbiology at Cairo University. This leads to a financial loss of $1.5 - 3 billion per year through costly medical care, loss of productivity, etc.. Hepatitis A is widespread in areas where poor hygiene prevails, and is endemic in developing countries, she added. "The incubation period of type A is an average of one month while that of B is between six to 16 weeks," Sobhi said.

Viruses A and B can both be prevented through personal and community hygiene and through vaccination, added Sobhi. "If the vaccination programme continues, hepatitis B can be eliminated."

Dr Samira Shoeb, professor of microbiology at Cairo University, said that the type B virus and HIV have similar modes of transmission: injections, blood transfusions, from mother to foetus, sexual transmission, etc. But a very small dose of the B type is sufficient to cause infection, while in the case of HIV, the virus must be present in large quantities for infection to take place.

Dr Hussein El-Orabi, assistant professor of internal medicine and endocrinology, said that hepatitis A is the most common hepatitis virus. "Its route of transmission, the fecal-oral route, facilitates its spread," he said. Infection with hepatitis A starts with influenza-like symptoms: fatigue, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, etc. "Some days later, symptoms of hepatitis start to appear: yellowish discoloration of the eyes and the passage of dark urine," he added.

Sobhi agreed that the most common viral hepatitis is type A, "but the most dangerous is type B," she said. "Hepatitis B has a tendency towards chronicity which leads in the long run to malignancies or tumours," Sobhi said. "Type A usually causes an acute infection, but type B causes a chronic infection and might lead to liver cancer," according to El-Orabi.

Dr Reda El-Wakil, assistant professor of tropical medicine and gastroentrology at Ain Shams University, emphasised that the hepatitis C virus, transmitted mainly through the blood route (for instance, through infected instruments at dental clinics, barbers, etc.), is the most common and most dangerous form of hepatitis. Besides accounting for 90 per cent of transfusion-associated hepatitis, type C has no definite incubation period. "It comes in a very sneaky way, to the extent that the patient might not find out that he is infected by the virus for several years, especially as many cases of hepatitis have no definite route of infection," said El-Wakil. Its most important symptom is chronic fatigue, he added.

"Virus C mostly does not cause 'yellowishness' of the eye, which makes it difficult to identify the disease," according to Dr Magdi El-Nawawi, assistant professor of immunology at Zagazig University's Faculty of Medicine and the secretary-general of the conference. The available treatment for hepatitis C is still considered investigational, as it always changes its genetic pattern, even within the same patient, Shoeb said.

Virus D, or delta agent, is an incomplete virus transmitted through the blood. It cannot produce inflammation of the liver by itself but is associated with hepatitis B infection, Sobhi said. "The presence of delta agent infection accelerates the course of chronicity and the condition of the patient progresses to fibrosis of the liver cells," El-Nawawi noted. In its late stages, this fibrosis leads to hepatic coma for which the only cure is hepatic transplantation, El-Orabi said.

Virus E, like A, is also transmitted through the fecal-oral route. Virus F and virus G are newly discovered types of the virus and are still under investigation, El-Wakil said.

Practitioners from other countries discussed measures taken to prevent the spread of hepatitis. Dr Ahmed El-Shatti, an environmental physician and secretary-general of the Kuwait Medical Association, said: "Although we introduced hepatitis B vaccination for high-risk groups, hepatitis is not Kuwait's first medical problem".

In the US, hepatitis poses a challenge to physicians and researchers. Dr Francisco Everhoff, from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, said the most common types of hepatitis in the US are types A, B, and C. "All three of them are still serious problems," he added.

Suzanne Nelsing, a physician in the Department of Infectious Diseases at Hvidovre University Hospital, Copenhagen, said that Denmark is an example of very low prevalence, although types B and C constitute a serious risk to Danish health care workers. "We don't have exact figures in the general population, but it is not a public health problem as in Egypt," she said.

Abla El-Mashad, head of the Microbiology Department at Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, said that physicians are still not sure of the transmission methods of type C, especially as the number of patients infected is greater than the number of transfusions involved.

The recommendations drawn up by the conference were presented by Dr Yehia Shahin, president of the Egyptian Society for Medical Microbiology (ESMM) and conference chairman. They were:

Updating the laboratory investigation methodology used for assessing the fitness of employment applicants.

Vaccination of risk groups.

Creating an awareness of occupational hazards among undergraduate medical students.

Guaranteeing safety measures in all health organisations.

Ensuring that quality control and quality assurance programmes exist.

Making use of recommendations, conclusions of abstracts and research papers of different scientific centres.

Emphasising the role of the media in creating awareness of the dangers and preventive measures of hepatitis among the population at large.

Shahin also said that, as a further step in dealing with viral diseases, the fifth international ESMM conference, expected to take place in December 1996, will deal with "AIDS and Emerging Microbial Diseases".

There is no effective treatment of viral hepatitis. Therefore, protection against it is the most important measure to avoid contracting the disease. In addition, two types of vaccines are now available for hepatitis A and B. The Health Ministry will hold a closed meeting on 25 November with participants from 22 countries to discuss the causes and methods of transmission of type C. Previous studies were confined to specific groups and not the general population, so this time all health and research centres in Egypt are called upon to cooperate in order to put together a comprehensive nation-wide study expressing accurate evaluations and estimations of the hepatitis problem in Egypt.

Problems with plants

For Dr Abdel-Baset Sayed, who claims he has discovered a remedy for the virus causing hepatitis, the uphill struggle is just beginning. Mona El-Nahhas investigates

In 1990, Dr Abdel-Baset Sayed, professor of biophysics at the National Research Centre (NRC), came up with a herbal remedy for the chronic Virus C, causing hepatitis. After five years of research, Sayed began to market the remedy, which if effective would prove to be a pioneering discovery. Thousands of desperate patients left their doctors and rushed to buy it.

Sayed immediately faced a barrage of opposition. Other scientists claimed that they had discovered the remedy first; within the NRC itself, he also met with problems.

Dr Nabil Abul-Enein, head of the NRC, attributes the discovery to a junior researcher at the centre, Essam Abdel-Aziz, who used to work as Sayed's assistant. "He has extensive knowledge about plants: his father was a herbalist. And if Sayed is telling the truth, why did he refuse to reveal the secret of his discovery during investigations? I'll tell you why: simply because he knows nothing about the formula, which he took ready-made from Abdel Aziz, and sold to patients."

Sayed was not on the committee which reviewed the experiment, and was referred to investigation for speaking to the media without permission.

A source at the NRC alleged that Abdel-Aziz and Abul-Enein have common financial interests, and that Abdel-Aziz pirated the discovery, but was unable to find a crucial component. "That's why the NRC delayed the announcement of the discovery," the source said.

At the NRC, Sayed is under strict surveillance. His visitors's bags are carefully searched on departure, to ensure that they do not contain the drug, which he is forbidden from selling.

Sayed filed a lawsuit against the NRC two months ago. The case will be heard before the Higher Administative Court on 12 October.

Last May, Sayed began preliminary measures for patenting the drug. "It will be registered in the US and Canada in addition to 27 European countries. The total costs of the registration process are $30,000 dollars, but it does not matter as long as the discovery is safe," he said.

Gamalat Ismail, a Dubai-based herbalist, claims that she discovered the effectiveness of the plants used in the drug, and that she provided Sayed with them, going so far as to finance the experiments. She added that she signed a contract with Sayed, whereby he would carry out the research in return for 25 per cent of profits. The herbalist also alleged that the contract, registered with the public notary last January, made it a condition that the discovery should bear her name. Sayed described Ismail's allegations as "lies". He said the herbs used were given to him by bedouins in Sinai. In addition, he did not sign the contract, and therefore it could not be considered a valid legal document. Ismail intends to file a lawsuit, demanding that her rights to the discovery should be reserved.

Dr Taha Esha, a Jordanian doctor, has also come forth with claims that he discovered the remedy. Esha emphasised that regardless of profits, he is only concerned with protecting his rights.

The Ministry of Scientific Research has stood to one side of the fray. "We are concerned with guarding the rights of scientists, yet we could not interfere in investigations conducted at the NRC. The ministry has no choice but to wait until the investigation is over," said Dr Venice Gouda, the minister. As for the remedy itself, tests are still being carried out to determine its effectiveness. Until a result is reached, the NRC is refusing all cases. If it is found to cure hepatitis, "the drug will be available free of charge," Gouda pointed out.

Dr Salah Zaki, assistant professor of hepatology at Cairo University, commented: "It's really very confusing. The herbal compound managed, in most cases, to kill the virus and to restore the normal percentage of hepatic enzymes in the blood. Yet certain symptoms of the disease, like the hepatic coma, sometimes reappeared. The experiment still needs time."

A specialised committee, including representatives of the ministries of health and scientific research and prominent professors of hepatology, was recently formed to follow up the patients who took the herbal remedy.

Sayed *responded to claims that the drug, when effective, was a* temporary solution, by asserting: "All the patients who took it five years ago responded positively . Monthly blood analyses indicated that the virus has completely disappeared from the blood and the liver," he said.

Mohamed El-Hennawi, one of Sayed's first patients, recalls: "The first time I visited Dr Sayed was in 1992. I was desperate; doctors everywhere had told me that my case was hopeless, and that the only alternative was a liver transplant, which would have cost nearly a million pounds. To my surprise, after only a month on Dr Sayed's remedy the symptoms disappeared. Soon I was back to normal."

Pot Pourri

The right choice

In the olden days young girls, usually denied education, were married off in their teens, with or without their consent. Mothers considered it their duty to encourage their daughters to accept "their fate".

Not so long ago, young women earned the right to education but were expected to tie the knot while the ink on their diploma dried. Once again, mothers actively hurried the process along. This remains common practice, and is often aided and abetted by the young women themselves. Case in point, the daughter of a friend who, after attending a wedding, cried out: "when am I finally going to graduate?"

But more and more young women these days refuse to walk this beaten path. Other endeavors are on their mind: a career, research, another diploma. They are attracted by art, *music*, travel, *full-time* careers. Without necessarily discounting the possibility of a traditional union, they have other priorities. That men should feel threatened by such an attitude is understandable. After all, the message delivered by many young women is that the other half is slowly becoming redundant.

Don't these girls want families? Some are not averse to the idea, although they tend to want a child without having to deal with a permanent husband. "Till death do us part" sounds more like a life sentence than a promise of marital bliss. Nothing here to make potential Si'l-Sayeds celebrate, kicking up their heels in anticipation of a life of sloth.

Oddly enough, however, hostility is more forthcoming from the women's quarters.

"Tell Yasmine to get her act together and start looking seriously for a husband," said Nada the other day to her friend Laila. "Your daughter is 24. It's about time she stopped this stupid studying and worried about her looks."

"*What's wrong with studying?*" protested "Laila. "She wants a PhD and a real career. She doesn't have time to look after babies."

"Nonsense," said Nada firmly. "She probably can't find a husband. That's why she says she doesn't want one."

"I don't think that's the problem," said Laila cautiously. " I think women these days know much more about the pitfalls of marital life."

"Pitfalls?" asked Nada aggressively, forgetting that her own (second) marriage was on the rocks, and that her two married children had no end of trouble. Her daughter is seriously contemplating divorce after only two years of marriage and Nada, hardly your average doting grandmother, is saddled with her son's two boys while their mother has one nervous breakdown after the other.

"Is Nazli still set on divorcing?" asked Laila rather pointedly. "It is not up to her," said Nada emphatically. "It was hard enough getting her to agree on a husband. I won't let her spoil it now. She thinks she *is too intelligent to stay home. This is the problem*, all these girls wanting to use their intelligence. If they were so smart they would understand that a woman is nothing without a man to lean on!"

Yasmine came in just in time to catch the tail end of Nada's harangue.

"Who needs a man to lean on?" she asked.

"You," said Nada... "and Nazli."

"But Nazli cannot lean on her husband," said Yasmine. "He's never there."

"He has to go to his mother for a decent meal, Nazli refuses to cook," said Nada, rather embarrassed.

"He should cook his own meals and let Nazli go to work if that's what she does best," suggested Yasmine.

Nada was extremely upset. What about the sanctity of marriage, the duty of a woman to have children, the maternal instinct, traditions and the need for a spouse on whose arm to face society?

"The young men I know," said Yasmine after a while, "are spoiled rotten by their parents and look *all set to lean* on their *future* wives. Besides, *why do* you assume that women can't stand up on their own? If I ever get married I would want a partner, not a crutch."

Laila tried to steer the conversation in a different direction, seeing that Nada was about to explode. But she wondered: Nada in her youth had fought tooth and nail for her own independence. Then she had given in, thinking that maybe as a married woman she would be freer from her parents' domination. Soon, she had a boy, a *girl and another baby on the* way. Busy cleaning up the mess that had become an integral part of her life, pushing the stroller with one hand while she separated the squabbling siblings with the other, she had little time for maternal and wifely bliss. Yet today, a woman of fifty, she is unwittingly stepping into her mother's shoes to uphold "tradition". Thirty years from now, would Yasmine, married and with a grown-up brood of her own, use the same arguments to convince a recalcitrant daughter that the tried path was the right choice?

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken and vegetable stew

Ingredients:

1 chicken (cut in quarters)
2 large green peppers (diced)
3 tomatoes (skinned and (diced)
1 medium carrot (diced)
1 large onion (finely chopped)
1 tbs. sumaa
1 tsp crushed garlic
Salt & pepper & allspice

Method:

Season well the chicken quarters with salt, pepper, allspice *and sumaa' and set aside. In a* round pan, fry the onion in butter until golden brown then add the garlic, stir fry it, then add the green pepper and the carrot. Stir fry them as well then place the chicken quarters over, skin sides down and cover. Leave to cook under medium heat. After 20-30 minutes uncover and stir the vegetable *mix*, turning over the chicken quarters. Add the tomatoes and cover until the chicken is cooked. Serve hot with rice or spagehetti and green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Here's looking at you kid

Nigel Ryan gets the goat

Ever wondered what happens to those sweet, rather demure looking goats that occasionally make their appearance on Cairo's streets? They are, far and away, the most attractive of domesticated animals, much more appealing than the flocks of fat-tailed sheep they so often lead. Strangely, though, their culinary appearances are fewer than one might suppose. One place where they do actually make it to the table is Le Coin du Kebab, a restaurant that has made goat something of a speciality.

There is an unfortunate tendency to group restaurants generically. Kebab shops tend to come pretty low down the list, having been up-staged by chi-chi competitors who window-dress better. But a kebab restaurant that pays attention to details, that cooks to order and makes sure that its raw materials are fresh and of the highest *quality is hard to beat.*

Le Coin du Kebab is an undemonstrative place. It is tucked away on a quiet street in the heart of downtown Cairo. The tables are covered with plastic cloths, the interior functional apart from a little decorative marble cladding. The tables sport artificial flowers. It scores pretty low in the smartness stakes. The food, however, more than makes up for the absence of starched tablecloths and impossibly folded napkins.

Last orders tend to be taken around 1.30pm. *We turned up with half an hour to spare, when* the salads were still fresh and crisp, though the bread could have benefited from a few minutes in the oven.

Now the thing about goat is that it has a tendency to be tough, unless it is cooked quickly and at high temperature. Like game, it should, ideally, be served on plates that are themselves too hot to handle. To hope for the latter, in even the most up-market of restaurants, is like wishing for the moon. But when the goat did arrive, it was piping hot and very, very tender. Pieces of breast, on the bone, cooked quickly over charcoal and served immediately. Quite delicious.

The osso bucco, ordered with the goat, was pedestrian if perfectly palatable. The *kofta*, though, was another thing altogether. Forget those hard little patés of minced meat cooked until they resemble pebbles that have, scandalously, become the norm. At Le Coin du Kebab mutton is finely minced, highly seasoned, then wrapped in a skein of fat that looks like creamy marble. It is very much a triumph of butchery and careful preparation over cooking, which is as simple as can be — just ten minutes over a *charcoal brazier. And the result resembles those* elongated bits of hamburger commonly served as *kofta* as turbot resembles a frozen fish finger.

Le Coin du Kebab offers soft drinks or Stella beer from the large refrigerator that dominates the dining room. Should you require anything else, the restaurant is perfectly happy for you to bring it along. They will provide glasses, and ice if necessary, a service for which they charge a moderate corking fee.

Salads, bread, one third of a kilo of goat, an *order of kofta and the osso bucco came to LE57.* Hardly a princely sum, hardly princely surroundings, but good honest food prepared by a restaurant that really does care about what it serves.

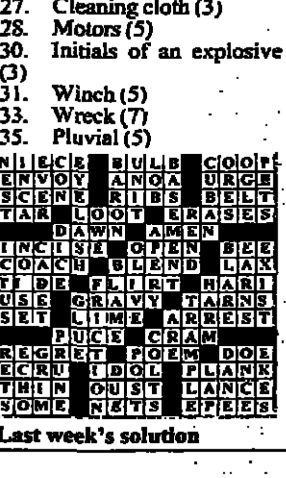
Le Coin du Kebab, 3, Dr Abdel-Hamid Said, Downtown. Tel: 57 58 400

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

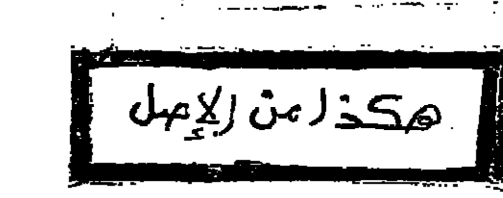
By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Merry (6)
6. Monetary unit of some Latin American countries, pl. (5)
10. Indefinite article (2)
11. Burden (4)
13. Type of goose visiting Britain in winter (5)
15. Hawaiian goose (4)
16. Pertaining to Jurassic type of rock (7)
18. Rule; set of principles (3)
21. Spiteful (6)
23. Cold dry Northern wind (4)
24. Old Roman poet (4)
26. Elevate (5)
27. Cleaning cloth (3)
28. Motors (5)
30. Initials of an explosive (3)
31. Winch (5)
33. Wreck (7)
35. Pluvial (5)
36. Gush out (4)
37. Arrange (4)
38. Group of organisms formed asexually from one ancestor (5)
40. DUE (7)
43. Pen (5)
44. Comb. form for "all" (3)
45. Ankle bone (5)
47. Musical note, pl. (3)
48. World-famous Japanese car (5)
50. Erudition (4)
51. Tranquility; comfort (4)
53. Warmth; zeal (6)
55. Kitchen vessel (3)
56. Smouldering (7)
58. Make a fuss about (4).
60. Grubby (5).
61. Wan (45)
62. Initials of a British political representative (2)
63. Bearing (5)
64. Separate batches of bread (6)

DOWN
1. Prison keeper (6)
2. Over (2)
3. Electrically charged particle (3)
4. Once again (4)
5. Pertaining to a satellite of the earth (5)
6. Disposed (5)
7. Elongated fish (3)
8. Catch of door or window (4)
9. Turkish (7)
12. Member of the legislative body (7)
13. Elevate; promote (5)
14. Shaft of column (5)
17. Derision; absurdity (5)
19. Avaricious (4)
20. Expansive (4)
22. Wee (4)
25. Absolute ruler (6)
28. It follows lime or sand (5)
31. Gold weight (5)
32. Ceremony (67)
34. Regret bitterly (3)
35. Legendary gigantic bird (3)
37. Attend departure of person as a sign of respect, 2 wds (7)
38. Pomade (5)
39. Flexible (7)
40. Orchestra (4)
41. Slosh over (4)
42. Pertaining to a continent (4)
43. Distort; obtain by effort (5)
45. .. and Bess, musical (5)
46. Structures of business or organisations, hyp. wds (6)
48. Political and commercial league of Germanic towns (5)
49. Received by ear (5)
52. Supplements (4)
54. Furnish again (4)
57. Suffix forming personal nouns (3)
59. Uninebriating drink (3)
62. I (2)



Last week's solution







Fighting the green devil

Pain in the neck, a drain on water resources, or a cost-effective industrial animal feed base? **Zeinab Abul-Gheit** looks at the debate surrounding the water hyacinth





Tourists taking a leisurely cruise down the Nile are often taken in by the lush green countryside which, further inland, melts away into the desert. Basking under the sun on lounge chairs, they are blissfully unaware that their ship is essentially ploughing through a field of aquatic weeds known as the water hyacinth, or the "green devil".

But unlike other species of aquatic fauna and flora, there is little that can be said of benefit about the water hyacinth in its natural habitat. It is, after all, a weed.

The plant, which exists in vast quantities in all of Egypt's water routes, especially the Nile, has significantly hindered and obstructed navigation, while absorbing copious amounts of water.

Like a plague, the plant has spread over the last 20 years to cover the majority of Egypt's water routes. In 1974, a study was conducted by the Agricultural Research Institute (ARI) to measure the growth of the plant in water routes. Dr Yehia Fayad, chief researcher at ARI's Research Institute for the Protection of Plants, discovered that the water hyacinth had blanketed the water routes in Cairo and Rashid. Ten years later, the plant was found to have spread into Upper Egypt, reaching Aswan. Moreover, allegations that the plant could not survive in saline water were shattered when it was discovered in the Suez Canal.

Fayad also found that the plant has taken root in 116,000 km of drainage canals, or 6 per cent of the entire public and private irrigation network.

More alarming was the plant's consumption of water. The combined surface area of Egypt's lakes is 36,000 feddans, and in each feddan, 250,000 hyacinths have made their home. Photosynthesis and evaporation caused by these plants means that, per day, each plant consumes one litre of water.

"As a result," said Fayad, "3 million cubic metres of water are lost daily, or 2 billion cubic metres per year." This quantity of water, he argued, could have been used to reclaim 180,000 feddans for agriculture.

With the problem reaching near epidemic proportions, determined efforts on the part of officials from the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources (MPWWR) have focused on clearing the Nile and the Suez Canal of this pestilent plant. Drainage canals, however, still pose a problem due to a shortage of resources to combat the weed.

Dr Abdel Hadi Radi, the minister of public works and water resources, explained that the use of chemical pesticides, was terminated in 1991 due to environmental concerns. The ministry, he said, has now begun domestically producing and importing machines for clearing away the plants, and the necessary equipment should be up and running by 1998.

These measures were aided by grants and loans from foreign donors. Zeinab El-Gharably, undersecretary of state and project director at the MPWWR, explained that in 1988, the ministry was granted a $45 million loan from the World Bank for the maintenance of water routes (4,700km) and the Nile (1,500km). This loan was supplemented by a US grant for $30 million earmarked for the purchase of heavy equipment to uproot the weeds.

These funds, maintained El-Gharably, will be instrumental in helping Egypt rid itself of these weeds. "The use of mechanical and biological techniques has proven to be highly successful," she said. An added bonus is that it is a more efficient alternative, and spares farmers the risk of contracting bilharzia while uprooting the weeds by hand.

In the meantime, the ministry has continued to wage biological war on the hyacinth invasion by enlisting the services of a small Chinese fish called the grass carp. While it is debatable how tasty these fish may be, they have proven to be effective weed wackers.

First introduced into Egypt's waterways in 1982, the Grass Carp has been bred in hatcheries in Aswan and Qanater Al-Shar'iya. These fish farms have turned out about 5 million young recruits every year. When fully grown, these fish weigh 1.5-2kg apiece, and according to El-Gharably, "are instrumental in doing away with the submerged weeds in the Al-Kalabiya and Asfoum canals in Upper Egypt." The fish, so far, have done their job well without affecting other, more innocent, marine life.



Workers, some using their bare hands and others operating a bulldozer, trying to uproot the hyacinth pest photo: Antoune Albert

Fayad, however, argues that the grass carp is not a totally effective tool against the weed. He maintains that it feeds only on submerged weeds or those that break the surface of the water.

Additionally, the ministry, following Fayad's recommendation has tentatively proposed the use of two species of insects which feed on the water hyacinth.

Research conducted by Fayad, which has followed the same track as research studies undertaken in Canada, Australia and the US, ascertains that the *Neochetina eichhorniae* and *Neochetina bruchi*, informally known as weevils, are best suited to combat the weed. Citing other African countries which have successfully used these two species of South American insects against the hyacinth invasion, Dr Fayad maintained that they pose no risk to other plants.

The MPWWR, however, is leaving the final decision to the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). "When we receive an official letter from the MOA approving the use of these insects, we will do so at once," said Radi.

The solution to the problem may be clear, but uncertainty still lingers about what to do with the hundreds of tons of the plant once it has been removed from the water. True to the old adage, waste not, want not, Dr Olfat Mansour has undertaken a path-breaking experiment to recycle the hyacinth into plywood. Mansour, a researcher at the National Research Centre's Cellulose and Paper Department, explained that the "research focused on this weed because of the environmental and economic problems they pose for Egypt."

He found that after drying the weed, treating it with resin, pouring the gelatinous mass into a mould and subjecting it to heat and pressure for 2-5 minutes, a water-resistant plywood is produced. The main advantage of the hyacinth plywood is that at 20 per cent the cost of many natural woods, it is an excellent alternative for industry and construction.

Other uses for the plant are also being investigated. Dr Hoda El-Husseini, assistant professor at the Animal Production Research Institute Animal Feeding Research Department, has carried out several successful experiments for turning the plant into feed for animals.

The experiments, which began in the 1970s, truly advanced in the 1980s when the plant was used as food for sheep and buffalo. In 1990, El-Husseini's efforts to turn out animal feed from the hyacinth were presented before the 3rd International Symposium on Seed Manufacturing and Quality Control. She argued that removing the roots of the plant reduced its weight by 60-70 per cent given that the plant retained a substantial amount of water. To compensate for the weight loss, she added carbohydrates such as molasses or grain at an amount equal to 10 per cent of the weight of the water drained from the plant. It was then left to ferment for 1.5 months. The silage is then fed to the animal in an amount equaling 2 per cent of the animal's body weight.

While the process may seem time-consuming and cumbersome, El-Husseini stressed that it is actually cheaper. But the refining process must be carried out. The plant contains substantial amounts of trace metals that must be removed.

Encouraged by her findings, she initiated further research which was completed this year. El-Husseini experimented with ways of using the water hyacinth for making hay. The findings were promising. "Comparing the nutritional value of the water hyacinth hay to the more commonly used rice straw, the new hay was higher in protein and cheaper," she noted.

But despite the findings by El-Husseini and other researchers, Radi is not convinced that the hyacinth-based feed and straw are economical alternatives. "According to studies by MPWWR researchers, these industries are still uneconomical because the water hyacinth is 90 per cent water," he said.

"However, researchers should feel free to experiment with the plant so that more promising results can be realised in the future," Radi added.

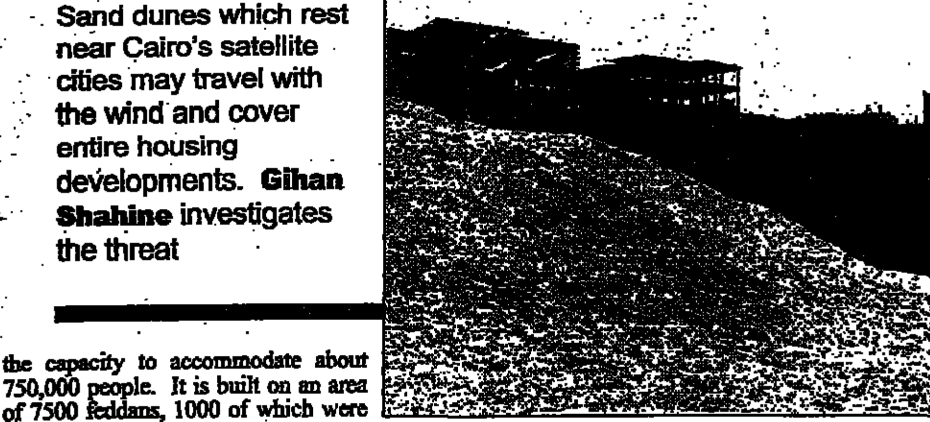
Radi's views are supported by another researcher, Dr Adib Fadl, head of the National Research Centre's Cellulose and Paper Department. "water hyacinth is not a viable option for the manufacture of plywood. Its mass contains only 2 per cent fibre."

"It would be better to simply remove and burn the plant. It absorbs too much water for it to be anything but a burden on the country's already scarce water resources," Fadl stated.

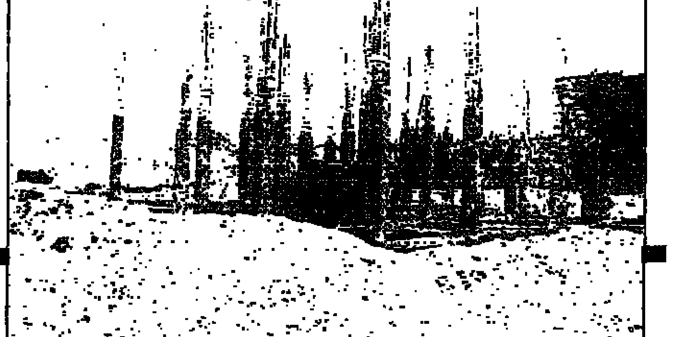
As the crossfire continues over the fate and use of the plant in industry, officials are more intent on ridding the country's water ways of the weed. Nonetheless, they are keeping an open mind in case the water hyacinth proves to be more of a friend than a pest.

Beware of the dunes

Sand dunes which rest near Cairo's satellite cities may travel with the wind and cover entire housing developments. **Gihan Shahine** investigates the threat







Sand dunes rub shoulders with buildings under construction at Al-Salam city near Cairo photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

The new satellite cities of Al-Salam, Al-Obour and Al-Nahda stand near Cairo at the beginning of the road to Ismailia and extend for dozens of kilometres into the desert. Unpaved roads run between parallel lines of five-storey buildings in Al-Salam and Al-Nahda.

Venturing beyond these roads is risky; cars often get stuck in sand. On the horizon, a series of dunes threaten adjacent buildings. In Al-Nahda, a new city built to accommodate those displaced by the 1992 earthquake, some buildings have been randomly built over the sandhills.

For the residents of these cities, the sandhills are a nuisance. They pollute the air, especially when the *khamasin* (sandstorm season) winds blow, fill houses with dust, and make walking difficult. One child found a 2-metre-long snake in the sand right in front of his housing block. Residents have filed complaints with the district municipality. Response has been positive but the remedy was short-lived-bulldozers moved the sand away three times in a period of two years.

But some geologists warn that the entire area was unsuitable for residence in the first place. They believe that the dunes—which can be 70 metres high and move at a speed of 7-10 metres a year — are dangerous to the cities' viability, especially in Al-Salam and Al-Nahda where no long-term protective measures have been taken yet.

According to official statistics, Al-Salam city has between 500,000 and one million inhabitants while Al-Nahda contains more than 1000 residential units. Construction in the city of Al-Obour started in 1987 and is scheduled to be finished in 2007, with the capacity to accommodate about 750,000 people. It is built on an area of 7500 feddans, 1000 of which were earmarked for industrial purposes. Seven districts have been built so far, with about 200 housing units.

A dune is a low hill composed of disintegrated soft round molecules of sand. As time passes, the whole dune rolls in the direction of the wind. During the *khamasin*, when the wind is stronger, the dunes pick up speed and cover the roads with blankets of sand, encroach on green areas and damage houses. This geological phenomenon has already proven dangerous in the Western Desert and Siwa. Dr Ali El-Sukkari, a geologist at the Nuclear Material Institute affiliated to the Ministry of Energy and Electricity, explains that in the Western Desert, the dunes move at a speed of about 10-18 metres a year and may move as fast as 100 metres a year during the *khamasin*. Roads there have been blocked, light-posts uprooted, palm trees, 4-5 metres tall almost buried and some houses in Siwa, had to be deserted.

"However, the dunes at Al-Salam, Al-Obour and Al-Nahda cities are not as dangerous," notes Dr El-Sukkari. "Due to construction in the area, they move at a much slower speed, estimated at 7-10 metres a year. Still, building in the area does not completely stop the movement of sand."

According to Dr Ahmed Farouk, geologist at the Institute of Nuclear Material, the housing units built over the sandhills are likely to collapse at any time. Leakage in the sewage system poses added peril. Acidic sewage water interacts with the soil, which may be composed of calcium carbonate or clay, and consequently dissolves it. Loose soil endangers the firmness of the foundations. Others believe that the construction of the satellite cities, which stand on the left side of the Cairo-Ismailia road, went ahead without proper planning. The right side of the road is not exposed to the threat of the dunes. Dr Atef Dardeer, former head of the Geological Survey Department, asserts that several studies were conducted on the area underlining the danger of dunes. Yet, the Ministry of New Development Communities did not seem to take them into consideration.

"In Egypt, geology is forgotten," Dr Dardeer complains, citing the cavernous terrain recently discovered at the newly built communities of Al-Minya Al-Gidida and 15th of May City. "No thorough studies were conducted before the construction. It was only when a taxi got trapped in one of the caverns in 15th of May City that geological research was initiated." Preventive measures, according to geologists, include planting special desert trees to firm up the soil, sprinkling the ground with sticky substances, erecting wind-fenders and fixing big stones on the dune slopes. They also advise monitoring the movement of dunes and the accumulation of sand along with a thorough probing of building foundations and sewage systems.

Government officials firmly reject geologists claims of negligence. Dr Mohamed Ibrahim Seliman, minister of New Development Communities, refutes any allegations that buildings were erected randomly and asserts that the ministry would never lavish millions of pounds on building cities without consulting specialists first.

"Thorough biological and architectural studies were conducted in the area of Al-Salam and Al-Obour," says Seliman. "The dunes at Al-Salam proved to be no danger, while counter measures were taken in Al-Obour. All construction specifications were applied to the buildings and sewage system networks."

Dr Adel Yehia, professor of geology at Ain Shams University and consultant to the Ministry of New Development Communities, agrees. He explains that recent geological studies have shown that the dunes of Al-Salam and Al-Obour are immobile. Studies also show that these dunes are accumulations of sand that were trapped hundreds of years ago in a depression called "the Heliopolis sinkage". Wind is detected to be moving into two opposite directions, which is further proof that the sandhills can not move. The real danger, according to Dr Yehia, is environmental pollution and the disintegration of soil.

Counter-measures were taken in Al-Obour city, including compacting the soil, defining building specifications and planting trees. Three million cubic metres of dunes located at Souq Al-Obour (Al-Obour Market) were recently levelled.

Asked why the government did not choose the right side of the Cairo-Ismailia road, Hussein El-Gibali, deputy minister of New Development Communities and supervisor of technical affairs, answers that it is all "a matter of land ownerships. The right side of the road does not belong to the ministry and is probably allotted for some investment projects."

Edited by **Fouad El-Gawhary** and **Tarek Atia**

New discovery

A PYRAMIDION, the cap-stone of a Pyramid structure, accidentally discovered by Alaeddin Shaat, an inspector at Giza, is now on display at the Giza-Plateau.

Shaat was excavating the northern side of Khufu's Pyramid when he came upon the relic, which studies have shown to be part of the missing tip of Khufu's "satellite" pyramid.

Zahi Hawass, director of antiquities at Giza, explained that excavation *of the pyramidion took place in stages.*

A large limestone block inclined on three sides was found south of Khufu's Great Pyramid. This proved to be the base of the pyramidion. The second part of the stone was the upper section of the pyramidion, lying to the north.

"Restoration has been made and the block and the pyramidion have been joined together and put on a base. It is now on display four metres from the Great Pyramid," Hawass said.

"This is the third Old Kingdom pyramidion to be found in Egypt," he continued. "The first was discovered near the 'Red' Pyramid of Senefru at Dahshur; this was restored and is now on a base in front of the pyramid entrance. The second was found around the subsidiary Pyramid of Menkure at Giza."

From scenes on the causeway of Sahure's monument at Abu-Sir depicting stages in the building of a pyramid, it seems that the pyramidion was the last part of the pyramid to be added to the structure. The scenes appear to show the king attending a ceremony of the final 'crowning' of the pyramid.



The reconstructed cap-stone of Khufu's "satellite "pyramid

photos: Sherif Sonbol

More restoration

Rapid deterioration of the monuments of Giza has prompted the decision to resume restoration and conservation. **Nevine El-Aref** visited Khafre's Pyramid

Khafre's Pyramid, Giza's so-called 'second pyramid', is currently closed for restoration work. While the closure is officially for three months, Zahi Hawass, director of antiquities at *Giza*, concedes that work *will probably take* longer: "Three months is not enough to finish all our work on the pyramid; six months is a more realistic time-scale," he said.

The project consists of restoring the pyramid's inner walls from the main doorway to the burial chamber, where fissures have appeared; providing a new lighting system and integrated ventilation; and installing a new stairway.

"The ventilation system will renew the air inside the pyramid every hour," Hawass explained, "and the new stairway will give access to the original entrance. People will leave by a different exit, ensuring a smooth flow of visitors through the pyramid."

According to Hawass, the breath of the millions of people *who visit the pyramid every year*, causing humidity and salt encrustation, has contributed to the monument's rapid deterioration. "More than two million visitors visit the pyramid annually, and each individual exhales about 20 grammes of water vapour, which causes humidity and damages the monument," he explained. "The rate of humidity in the pyramid as of now is 77 per cent."

This is the second time since a site management plan *was made for Giza in 1987, that* one of the *major monuments* has been closed for restoration. The first was when the Great Pyramid of Khufu was temporarily sealed off for repairs and installation of extra lighting, ventilation apparatus and closed circuit TV. When Khufu's Pyramid was reopened to the public an additional fee was imposed, and a consequence of this was that the number of visitors to Khafre's Pyramid increased because the monument was now included in the price of the Khufu ticket.

Apart from human breath, Hawass cites "rain, the sound of aircraft, and the earthquake of 1992," as further causing damage to the pyramid. "No fewer than 10,000 blocks are damaged and are now precariously balanced," he said. "It's not only internal work that's needed; the exterior of the pyramid needs restoration, too".

Mansour Radwan, an *inspector* at *Giza Plateau, said* that 18 conservationists and two inspectors are at work on Khafre's Pyramid. "We started by removing graffiti from the walls of the burial chamber and some of the corridors," he said.

In fact, closed circuit TV is being installed with just this in mind — to stop visitors damaging the monument. "There will be a fine of LE300 for anyone damaging the monument," Radwan said. "And a wooden partition will be placed in front of the sarcophagus in the burial chamber in order to prevent visitors from sitting or standing on it."Once restoration of Khafre's Pyramid is complete, restorers will turn to the third, smallest pyramid at Giza, Menkaure's Pyramid. And in order to ease the pressure caused by the number of visitors at Giza, work is in progress so that two other sites can be opened to the public. At Abu-Sir, south of Giza, the pyramids of King Sahu-Re and Newoser-Re will shortly be opened, and at Dahshur, south of Saqqara, the famous 'bent pyramid' and 'northern pyramid' of Senefru will soon be placed on the tourist itinerary, as well as Amenemhat III's Pyramid, described by Hawass as "a great structure made of sun-dried mud brick, an imposing Middle Kingdom monument."

"We have 97 pyramids in Egypt," said Hawass. "Eventually, we should open them all to the public, so visitors will have more options. At the moment people all head for Giza and Saqqara."



The Pyramid of Khafre, clearing prior to restoration

November quiz!

Here is our first question for November :

In the third century, Christians were persecuted, especially under the Roman emperors Septimus, Decius and Diocletian. Many sought refuge in the Western Desert. Do you know where?

We are waiting for your answers for October. Deadline 15 November. Don't miss our prizes.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 245
Answer to Question 2, issue 246
Answer to Question 3, issue 247
Answer to Question 4, issue 248

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.

Sahl Hashish

A CONTRACT was signed last week between the Ministry of Tourism and the National Bank of Egypt along with insurance companies and businessmen in the tourist business, to develop the area of Sahl Hashish on the Red Sea.

Sahl Hashish covers an area of 32 million square metres, with a 12km shoreline. Plans are being made to turn the area into a tourist centre with 1,200 rooms, and a company, to be called the Egyptian Company of Tourist Resorts, will be established to carry out the project with a capital of LE700 million.

The resort will include gardens, shopping centres, sporting facilities and workers' housing. The first stage of the project, which will provide around 20,500 job opportunities, is expected to be completed in five years.

"In the past, particularly in the 1993-94 season, our main priority was to promote Egypt abroad," said Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui. "Things are different now. Our main target is the development of our own resources."

Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, head of the banking union, declared that this was the first time that such a large project has been carried out with Egyptian capital. While the project will be implemented by the National Bank of Egypt and other private sector companies (including Pyramisa and Ghabbour insurance companies), 40 per cent of the project is open for public investment, leaving a clear field for other interested parties, he emphasised.

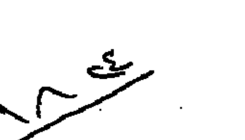
According to Ahmed Zaki, head of the Union of Tourist Chambers of Commerce, the first stage of the project will cover 12 million metres overlooking the sea, the second and third stages will include the development of areas set back from the coast. "This project is expected to be four times as *beneficial to the Egyptain* economy as Hurghada. In fact, Hurghada could be said to be the first stage of the Sahl Hashish project," he said.

Faster turnaround

THE RULE obliging charter planes flying from Sharm Al-Sheikh to Petra in Jordan to remain in Jordan for two days before returning to Sharm Al-Sheikh has been revoked. The decision was taken in response to requests to the Jordanians from EgyptAir. The Egyptian airline had argued that they would be able to provide a wider and more efficient service to Petra if the planes were allowed to return on the same day.

Hong Kong route

FOLLOWING an increase in tourism from Hong Kong to Egypt, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui has decided that a route should be established for charter planes flying from Hong Kong to Cairo and vice versa.



One big, unhappy family

Money talks, but sports clubs balk at implementing a new edict passed by Egyptian basketball officials. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab goes behind the scenes

A little cross-pollination never hurt, or so the Egyptian Basketball Federation (EBF) mistakenly thought. Major General Mohamed Hassanein Omran, the EBF president, announced that clubs now have the option to buy the contracts of bench-warming players from other clubs. Theoretically, this move should give idle players a chance to prove themselves on the court while building a solid base of clubs and players in the premier league instead of the four main clubs and two teams now in existence.

"For the benefit of the national team and the basketball players, I have issued, in conjunction to the EBF's board, an edict allowing for the transfer of players from one club to another," said Omran. The new rule will go into effect in the first half of December.

While the EBF's decision opens the door for financial incentives for players, thereby buying allegiance to a club, not all parties have welcomed the move with open arms. The Ahli, Zamalek, Gezira and Itihad clubs have rejected the decision, claiming that they have no money to cover the financial needs of basketball players as well as football players. Club officials maintain that they have trained the players as a team, not as individuals. Recruiting independents from other clubs, they argue, would delay competitions and disrupt the training schedules.

To drive their point home, they have verbally agreed to disband their basketball teams if the federation insists on implementing the new edict.

This did not sit well with Omran who asserted that such a move was not within the clubs' rights, and would ultimately cost them the federation's support and public approval.

Ironically, however, the purchase and sale of player contracts has been going on for some time within the clubs. In the tradition of cloak and dagger Cold War espionage techniques, coaches from some clubs have been seen enticing young players with offers reaching LE40,000. The players, in turn, have been razzled, dazzled and starry-eyed at the prospect of fat pay checks.

Therefore, so long as money has talked, the players have readily walked, opting for fame and fortune over allegiance to a particular club. *For example, Samir Gouda left* Zamalek to play in the US, and is now in Greece. Hisham Abu Serea left Zamalek to play in South Africa.

But when it comes to money matters, rumours are bound to fly from the mouths of the bored and the boastful. The focus of the most inflated rumours was Sherif El-Sanadelli, Zamalek-team centre. Critics charge that Omran passed this new edict so that El-Sanadelli, who is engaged to Omran's daughter, can secure more lucrative contracts. El-Sanadelli, to put an end to the allegations and push himself out of the spotlight, has announced that he will not play for any national clubs, but will look to play only on international teams.

But in the midst of the rumours, furore and grumbles, Omran stands baffled and alone. "I don't know why people oppose the idea of transferring players from one team to another if it will be beneficial for the national team in the long run," he queried, adding, "The same thing goes on in football."

"If the clubs pay the players what they deserve, no one will defect to another club. Ultimately, this is what the new edict aims at," he said.



An EBF edict may give benched players a shot at playing if sports clubs agree to pay up *photo: Abdel-Aziz El-Nimr*

Football in chains

When the teacher becomes the student, it is time for Egyptian football fans to impugn the teams' skills, says Ahmed El-Said

The winds of change are blowing in the world of African football and for Egypt, the miasma is one of doom and gloom.

It was Egypt that introduced the sport to the rest of Africa, and subsequently dominated it. But now, through a cruel twist of fate coupled with really shoddy skill, Egypt has lost its footing on a mountain it had climbed several times in the past.

In the recent African Championship and the Arab Cup finals, as the legendary Ismaili team and the once all-powerful Ahli team crumbled before Asec Abidjan and Tunisia's Al-Afrique, so did the dreams of Egyptian football fans. Given that Egyptians view sports results as an indicator of Egypt's leadership among Arab and African countries, Ahli's 4-1 defeat to Al-Afrique leaves Egypt standing on shaky ground.

The Ismaili-Asec game was also a reflection of the weakness of Egyptian football. Although the Ismailis got off to a powerful start, scoring a goal in the sixth minute of the first half, an aggressive Asec counter-attack, supplemented by three faux pas by Abu Greisha, El-Sayed and Beshir, quickly turned the tide in favour of Abidjan. Even then, the game could have been won by the Ismailis. Abu Greisha, El-Gamal and other players, however, were too intent on proving they had the moves. They didn't.

To move on to the finals, Asec needed to win 3-1, but by the end of the first half, they were no closer to realising their goal. Osama Khalil, the Ismaili coach, however, made it possible. By replacing Abu Greisha with Essam Abdel-Aal, be implemented the 6-4-1 formation and left the Ismailis vulnerable to an Asec advance.

Asec seized the chance and scored four goals in the second half, snatching the title and leaving Egyptian fans wondering how this defeat would reflect on the outcome of the Nations Cup in two months.

If these two games are any indication, the forecast is not promising. Since 1980, Egypt has been unrivaled in its domination of the continental club competitions. Not even England or Italy have approached the Ahli and Ismaili record of 12 trophies in seven years. Now, however, it is doubtful that Egypt will win the African title in Johannesburg in 1996 or qualify for the 1996 World Cup in France.

Asec and other African teams have proven to be more deserving of the African trophy than Egypt. But despite the results, Egyptian sports officials like Abdel-Moneim Emara and Dahshouri Harb are not convinced. In several television interviews, both officials have referred to Egypt's 21st place FIFA ranking as proof that Egyptian football is still strong. This rank places Egypt ahead of all other African nations as well as football powerhouses such as England and Uruguay.

What these officials have either ignored or chosen to forget is that FIFA ranks are determined by the number of matches won, and do not take into account the reputation and strength of the opposing team. Therefore, according to these rankings, a win over Burkina Faso would be tantamount to a win against Germany or Brazil. Highly unlikely.

African football teams are more skilled and more disciplined than their Egyptian counterparts. This may be a bitter pill to swallow, but it is far more realistic than pinning the country's hopes on Rudi Kroll or Franz Beckenbaur's abilities to make something out of nothing.

As good as these two trainers may be, they will not be able to compensate for the poor training received by the players in formation school. A more feasible approach would be to use the current teams to maintain the momentum while directing the federation's energy and resources on youngsters who can help Egypt recapture its past glory.

Time to pay the piper

They won some and lost some, but cavalier attitudes aside, Egypt's volleyball team had some explaining to do back home. Abeer Anwar reports

Few were more surprised than the Egyptian volleyball team with their second place finish in the African Nations Cup. Emerging triumphant from the Zimbabwe Games, the volleyball team thought it would be smooth sailing in the championship, held in Tunisia from 13-21 October. This was not to be the case.

"This is not at all what we expected from the team," said Sayed Mustafa, manager of the Egyptian Volleyball Federation (EVF). "They were not up to par, and as a result, we're (the EVF) thinking of slashing the players' prize for the gold in Zimbabwe from LE5,000 to LE2,000."

For the players, this may be a slap in the face, but the brunt of the matter is that they let themselves down. The team's Italian advisor, Pittera Carmelo, had predicted prior to the championship that they would "take the victory as easily as they did in the Games." And for a while, this proved to be true.

After defeating Algeria, the team's spirits were soaring. "I think we have crossed the half-way mark to the World Cup," said Azmi Megahed, the national team's coach. Kenya was the next to fall, 3-0, to the powerful bunts and smashes delivered by the Egyptians.

But just when Carmelo was beginning to look like a fortune teller, the team snatched defeat from the hands of victory. In their match-up against Tunisia, they walked onto the court a little too elated and self-confident. What they didn't factor into the equation was that Tunisia, traditionally a powerful team, had missed the Zimbabwe Games in favour of training for the African Nations Cup and the subsequent World Cup and the African Qualifications for the 1996 Atlanta Games.

In the match against Tunisia, Egypt lost the first set 15-5, after three tie-breakers, lost the second set 17-16 and also claimed the third set 15-13.

Following their 3-0 defeat, it was time for explanations. "We played 2 difficult competitions in a row, and as a result, were tired in this one," explained Abdel-Rahman Quef, head of the Egyptian delegation. "They (Tunisia) reached their peak fitness before the Cup, so the players were relaxed."

There was, however, a small ray of sun that broke through the clouds. Even though they finished second, the team still qualified, along with Tunisia, for the World Cup in Japan from 18 November to 3 December. In addition, they will also move up to the African Qualifiers for the Atlanta Olympics, scheduled to be held next March in Morocco. There, they will face off against Algeria and Morocco, and, they hope, will secure a place in the 1996 Olympics.

This, according to Carmelo, is no small accomplishment. "The Atlanta Qualifiers are more important to me than the World Cup," he said.

For the team, the results of the African Nations Cup are water under the bridge. Their attention is now focused on the upcoming competition. To prepare, the team will enter a week-long closed camp in the Olympic Centre in Maadi. They will then travel to Italy on 4 November for a series of friendly matches with Italy's national team and some of the clubs.

The need for speed

With the pedal to the metal, Sherif El-Sakkaf takes third in the Super Sport Trophy. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

Seven years of grinding gears and popping the clutch in a driver's school in Switzerland paid off for Sherif El-Sakkaf who finished third in the final round of the Super Sport Trophy European GT race in Dijon, France from 21-22 October.

Zooming past the checkered flag at 277km/h in a Venturi GT 400, El-Sakkaf had no clue how many laps he had raced, nor where he had placed. Facing a French TV announcer waving a microphone, El-Sakkaf asked, "How did I do?"

When the Frenchman replied that he had come in third, El-Sakkaf was stunned. "No, No. There must be a mistake," he exclaimed. There was no mistake.

"It's a great accomplishment for me to win this round of the Super Sport Trophy, especially since I haven't been racing for three years," said an elated El-Sakkaf. "But now I'm confident that given another chance, I can do even better."

These chances, however, are not easy to come by. The last race El-Sakkaf had competed in was the Formula 3 race in England in 1991. He finished among the first six racers and caught the eye of one of the top GT race car drivers in Europe, Phillipe Charriol. Charriol promised him an invitation to one of the Super Sport Trophy rounds in 1995. The race is made up of eight rounds, each held in a different European city.



While Charriol was working on fulfilling his promise, El-Sakkaf was embracing the entrepreneurial spirit by introducing karting to Egypt. Three years passed before he received notification from Charriol that he was to race in the final round of the GT race.

"I arrived in Paris two days before the race with a high fever, but I was still determined to keep on track," said El-Sakkaf.

The race officials gave each driver only one set of tires for both the qualifiers and the one-hour race, so El-Sakkaf compensated by limiting the number of laps he raced on the circuit tests and qualifiers.

Still new to the course, he was concerned when race officials did away with the rules on cornering and turning. "That really scared me," he recalled. Drawing on the experience of other drivers, El-Sakkaf studied the course and was able to secure fourth position for the race.

In all, 16 cars competed in the race, including a Porsche Super Cup, a Ferrari 348 Challenger and the Venturi GT 400, Charriol's choice as well as El-Sakkaf's. Although Charriol was racing in the competition, a bone-crunching crash with another driver knocked him out of the race.

A one-minute refueling pit stop was called during the race, and El-Sakkaf made full use of the period to stop before the other drivers, therefore securing for himself the lead. But towards the end of the race, Edouard Chaufour and P. Regnaulc whipped past him to finish first and second, respectively, and leaving him with third.

With the taste of victory still fresh in his mouth, El-Sakkaf is hungry for more. He is currently seeking a sponsor for all eight rounds of next year's Super Sport Trophy, and a chance for the title.



photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehiti

AFTER walking away with the gold in the First African Bodybuilding Championships, Egypt's bodybuilders are determined to pump iron all the way to the top.

In the five-nation event, held in the indoor hall of the Ahli Club, Egyptian muscle men posed and flexed their way to three gold and three silver medals. The gold medal winners were Anwar El-Ammawy (65kg), Ahmed Abdel-Salam 70kg) and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid (80kg). The silver medals dangled from the beefy necks of Mohamed Abdel-Aziz (65kg), Magdi Shahata (70kg) and Khaled Ahmed Mohamed (90kg).

Egypt's main rival for the gold, South Africa, came in second with 74 points from two gold and two silver medals. Morocco took third with 37 points and Mauritius placed fourth with 23 points. Libyan bodybuilders brought up the rear in fifth place.

Egyptian world bodybuilding champion El-Shahat Mabrouk, showed his stuff in an exhibition show. He did not compete as he is in training for the World Championship in Jawa, Indonesia.

Reported by ***Amira Nabil***

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**





Three weeks ago, Barrada defeated world top-ranked player Jansher Khan in an exhibition match in New York *photo: Al-Ahram*

Ahmed Barrada:

Squashing the opposition

At the age of 17 he surprised the world, scooping up the title of world junior squash champion in New Zealand in 1994. Almost 18 now, he has moved up to the seniors. Meanwhile, he trains hard and dreams of the next surprise: the Men's World Championship this month

Ahmed Barrada was introduced to squash at the tender age of eight. After being mesmerised by his sister's practice sessions, he leapt onto the court himself. His goal then was to become the national junior champion. A couple of years later, he had won every national juniors competition and become the champion in the under-10, -12, -14, -16 and -18 events. At 12, he was dreaming of the world junior championships. At 15, he went pro and began to take part in the seniors' events as well, playing against the country's top senior players. He did not always win.

Barrada knew he needed more experience: he needed to take on the world's top champs in the game's major events, so he would have a chance to be listed in the world rankings.

Few sports stars make the big time with no hitches. Barrada would seem to have had it better than most — his father, after all, is general manager of the Egyptian Squash Federation. But this made no difference: the federation had no funds, not even for the general manager's son, and was of no help to him at the beginning. Just like other sports federations, squash was feeling the crunch of a budget deficit, and could not pay for Barrada to participate in international events abroad.

Then a fairy godfather, in the guise of a very successful businessman, stepped in. Ibrahim Kamel believed that Ahmed was a promising young talent. "He supported and sponsored me. I was able to play in most of the world's major juniors events, and I have to confess that I was fortunate to find him. My other colleagues, who do not have any sponsors, don't have my chances and have problems in competing abroad, though their parents are helping out as much as they can."

On court, Barrada is aggressive and lightning-quick: apparently an adversary to be reckoned with. Off court, he is a normal teenager, if surprisingly quiet. He likes playing football and listening to his best friend, singer Alaa Abdel-Khaleq.

The world junior championship in New Zealand last year was Barrada's second international tournament. His first experience with the big time was Hong Kong's world juniors in 1992. He reached the quarterfinals in the singles and was placed fourth, winning the team's bronze medal. The youngest player in the tournament, he also received a special award.

After '92, Barrada was determined to win the '94 world juniors. Concentrating on his goal, he successfully captured the title, winning all seven matches on his tour 3-0. He lost only to his teammate, Omar El-Borolossi, whom he went on to defeat 3-2 in the final for the title. After Barrada's victory in the singles, team morale peaked. The team promised their coach, Abbas Qawoud, that they would bring home the title and they did it; the young pharaohs, as the press abroad called them, dominated the courts and won all their team matches.

Barrada was pleased by the kudos, but what made him happiest was the fact that President Mubarak congratulated the team on their success and decorated the young champ with the first-class sports medal. "In order to meet the president, I skipped the European Open in Hungary, which was being held at the same time. But I don't regret missing it," said Barrada, grinning from ear to ear.

For the past six years, the top-ranked world juniors champion has been travelling all over the world. He has visited more than 40 countries and has been through five passports. He travels to London every three weeks to play a match in the English league and then comes back to Cairo. Barrada plays professionally in the Wiezers Club. Together with his teammates, he won second place in the English league.

Barrada's first trip abroad was unforgettable, but not necessarily for the right reasons. "I was travelling alone for the first time. I spent the whole day searching for a room, and when I finally found it, the driver asked me for $400. Then some men broke into my room that night and took the rest of my money. What a day!" He shakes his head, giggling at his misfortune.

Barrada's collection includes many national and international titles. In the juniors, he was English champion four consecutive times, from 1991 to '94. Titleholder of the Scottish Open for three consecutive years, he also took the gold in 1994 in Denmark and the Netherlands. Barrada is also the Arab junior champion.

He has not yet brought home the gold in any major seniors events. He won the Qatar International Men's Open, was runner-up in San Francisco and third in the Brazil Men's International Tournament in '94. When Barrada started participating in the men's competitions, he was ranked in the 40s, but with his participation in the major seniors events during the year, he was able to improve his ranking to 29th. He took part in international competitions in the Far East: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, where he played against some of the world's top-ranked seniors, and managed to reach the quarterfinals.

He then participated in the Australian Open, where he defeated Australian Anthony Hill, ranked no. 9 world-wide, to win the championship title. He also won the Greek international tournament, defeating world-ranked nos. 10 and 14 for the title.

But Barrada, although it is easy to forget, is, after all, a teenager, a student in his first year at the Faculty of Commerce, Cairo University. He is, however, a teenager with ambition; participating in the US Open two weeks ago, he reached the semi-finals, and it is only the shoulder injury he suffered a few days later which is now making his participation in next week's world championship in Cyprus uncertain.

The world men's singles championship, in Cyprus from 7 to 11 November, will be his next challenge. He will compete against the world's top ten and he is determined to prove himself among the seniors. In Cairo, from 13 to 21 November, Barrada will play with his teammates in the team's world championship.

Barrada's day usually starts early in the morning: two hours of calisthenics and jogging under the supervision of Alaa Shaker, the national football team's trainer. After breakfast there are two hours of squash. In the afternoons, he trains for another three or four hours.

But does such a rigorous regimen leave him any time to just hang out with the guys? Barrada cannot even remember his childhood. "I never played children's games with my friends. My life was different. Childhood dreams were replaced by my sport: I dedicated my whole life to it. But if I was still young, I would choose the same game over again, because whenever I win I feel it is worth it." After he won the world championship, his responsibilities increased further: "now people expect more from me, and I can't let them down."

Still, he tries to go out with his friends once a week — "otherwise I would go mad". The past three or four summers have been spent in camps and competitions. This summer was little different: no more than a week-end or so snatched between training sessions.

Beyond squash, there is life: Barrada dreams of becoming minister of youth and sports. What would he do differently? "Encourage individual sports and allocate more money. Huge amounts are spent on football which never achieves any remarkable results compared to the individual sports."

Sports would also solve a multitude of his contemporaries' problems, he believes. "People have to do sports, just for themselves. They don't have to be champions, practicing sports is enough. It will protect them from a lot of bad habits: cigarettes, alcohol and even drugs."

*Profile by **Inas Mazhar***

Pack of Cards

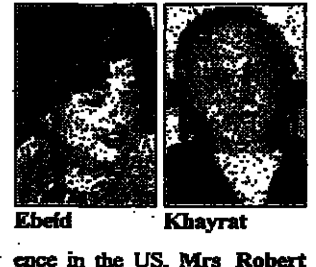
by Madame Sosostris



photo: Hussein Fathi

❤ Oh! the price one has to pay for being an exceedingly talented journalist. The *Weekly*'s very own **Tarek Atia**'s holiday to the States was cut short by the marvellous news that he was one of the three MEDnews prize-winners, and he hurriedly got on the first plane back to Egypt to make it to the award-giving ceremony in Alexandria's Palestine Hotel earlier this week. The MEDnews competition was organised by the European Commission funded programme MEDMedia, and **Tarek**'s article on Westernisation in Egypt, published in the *Weekly* earlier this year, won him not only first prize, fame and a rather substantial fortune, but also enabled him and the other prize winners to attend interesting seminars on journalism in a three-day conference held by the programme and inaugurated last Saturday by Chairman of the Board, Chief Editor of Al-Ahram and Head of the Press Syndicate **Ibrahim Nafie**, who proudly handed **Tarek** his prize. With our own **Sahar El-Bahr** also a first prize prize-winner in the first MEDnews competition last year, let's hope the *Weekly* continues the tradition each year. Considering the current state, this shouldn't be too difficult at all.

♦ My good friend and dynamic parliamentarian **Mona Makram Ebeid** was re-elected president of the Middle East and North Africa region of the Parliamentarians for Global Action, an independent network comprised of more than one thousand legislators from over 85 countries which focuses on the worthwhile task of tackling global issues raised by the United Nations. As **Mona** smiled with pride and self-assurance, her appointment was officially declared during the Parliamentarians annual forum recently held at the American Senate. And no better person could also have been chosen convener of the Peace-keeping and Conflict Resolution Programme of the association. Taking advantage of her presence in the US, **Mrs Robert Pelletreau** asked **Mona** to also address the high-powered group, Women for Foreign Policy, where she quite charmingly gave a beautiful lecture at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace.



Ebeid **Khayrat**

♦ **Omar Khayrat** is one of my favourite composers and pianists, so when I heard recently that his latest album *Wahabiyat* had just been released, I was probably one of the first people to buy it. The album is **Omar's** second collection of new musical arrangements for the songs of legendary singer **Abdel-Wahab**. And trust me on this one, dears, if anyone can get away with interpreting Abdel-Wahab's classic music and make it sound just as good as the original version, then **Omar Khayrat** is that person. It'll be a while before I get my fill of this album, dears, and when I do, it'll probably be just in time to buy his next album — his eleventh — to be released next January and featuring an Arabic rhapsody and a collection of *film and TV show soundtracks*.

